IT'S THE SMALL THINGS THAT COUNT: MAKING SENSE OF WORKING IN A PARTNERSHIP TO SUPPORT THE INCLUSION OF A CHILD WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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By Annette Patricia Guerin

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Contents

Abstract

Since the passing of the Education Act (1989) special education policies and documents have promoted partnership as a key component of establishing relevant and inclusive school practices. Professionals and families have been encouraged to work together to resolve issues for children with disabilities. However, little information is available to families and professionals about how to negotiate and achieve authentic partnerships.

This thesis makes an important contribution to current knowledge about partnerships by investigating how a group of people (a parent, teacher, paraprofessional and teacher/researcher) make sense of working together to support the inclusion of a student with ASD in his regular school. It is hoped that our descriptions of how we have worked together may help other professionals and families in similar situations. In saying this, the lessons we have learned are ours and are peculiar to the context in which we worked.

In New Zealand partnership between professionals and families of children with disabilities is usually enacted through the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. This study utilises an alternative partnership model, the Quality Learning Circle (QLC). The participants' learning journeys are described and the experience of partnership for the participants is discussed. Data are drawn from a range of sources to identify those strategies that support, and barriers that hinder, the development of authentic partnerships. Findings identify those conditions that were essential for the partnership in this study to work effectively.

Within this research I contrast the key dimensions of the IEP and QLC, showing the IEP process to be wanting. I suggest a partnership model that embraces a dual focus on both the student and those supporting him/her is a more effective tool for supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities.

It is argued that there is a lack of recognition in current funding criteria for the difference an effective partnership can make in supporting the inclusion of students

with severe behavioural challenges. Consideration needs to be given to the costs and issues of ineffective partnerships, with a particular focus on current Ministry of Education practices.

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To Giff, Jack and Emily, my homework is done. It's time to play!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

My study focuses on the process of partnership for a team of people (parent, teacher, paraprofessional and Special Education Needs Coordinator) working together to include a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder in a regular classroom. My professional role is that of a Special Education Needs Coordinator / Ongoing Reviewable Resourcing Scheme teacher. This involves working within a variety of teams with other professionals, families, whanau, support staff and students to plan for, and identify, best practice for the students within their educational settings. A challenge of my role is bringing together professionals and families, often acting as a bridge between the various groups. An example is explaining the language of school to parents and the language of special education to teachers.

My study is placed within the classroom (or micro level of education). However, the inclusion of students with disabilities cannot work in isolation from national (or macro level) policies and initiatives. Therefore, this chapter will examine some of the key policies and initiatives that define special education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It does so with a particular focus on partnerships between education providers and families of students with disabilities. It examines the contributions team and school members can make within a partnership. Further to this, it identifies issues and best practice research to support the inclusion of students with ASD within regular school settings. Key research findings are reviewed with reference to partnership within these educational contexts. My roles within education have been critical in defining my understanding of partnership issues and these roles are discussed as a starting point for this study.

My role in education

During 24 years working in education I have held a variety of roles at both classroom teaching and management level in schools in New Zealand and Britain. I have also worked for a number of education agencies in advisory and proctoring roles. During the last twelve years within my general and special education roles, I have focussed on including students with disabilities within their regular classrooms. My current role

as Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) entails working in partnership with a number of classroom teachers, paraprofessionals and families to plan, model and implement strategies and programmes to support students with a wide range of disabilities within their regular classrooms.

In my years working within my own classroom teaching and special education roles I have become increasingly aware of the gaps between my understanding of inclusion and the practices of teachers (including myself), professionals and families working and living with students with disabilities. Of particular interest to me is the notion of partnership, of teams working together collaboratively. This study is an opportunity for me to explore the literature, to reflect on my practice and to consider the implications of this work for my future practice.

As a participant in many meetings between professionals and families with children with disabilities it is my belief that all participants at these meetings share the desire to do the best for the children involved, but the actual process of working collaboratively is challenging. As a teacher I am keen to participate in a partnership where all members plan for and support a student with ASD in his presence, participation and learning at his school. As a researcher I wish to examine the process of partnership within the context of both educational (macro level) policies and (micro level) practice.

Special education in New Zealand: Policy and legislation

The 1989 Education Act mandated the rights of all New Zealand children with disabilities to an inclusive education within their local community, that is, access to the same quality of education as their peers. For the first time in New Zealand's history all children aged from five to nineteen years were entitled to free enrolment and education at any state school.

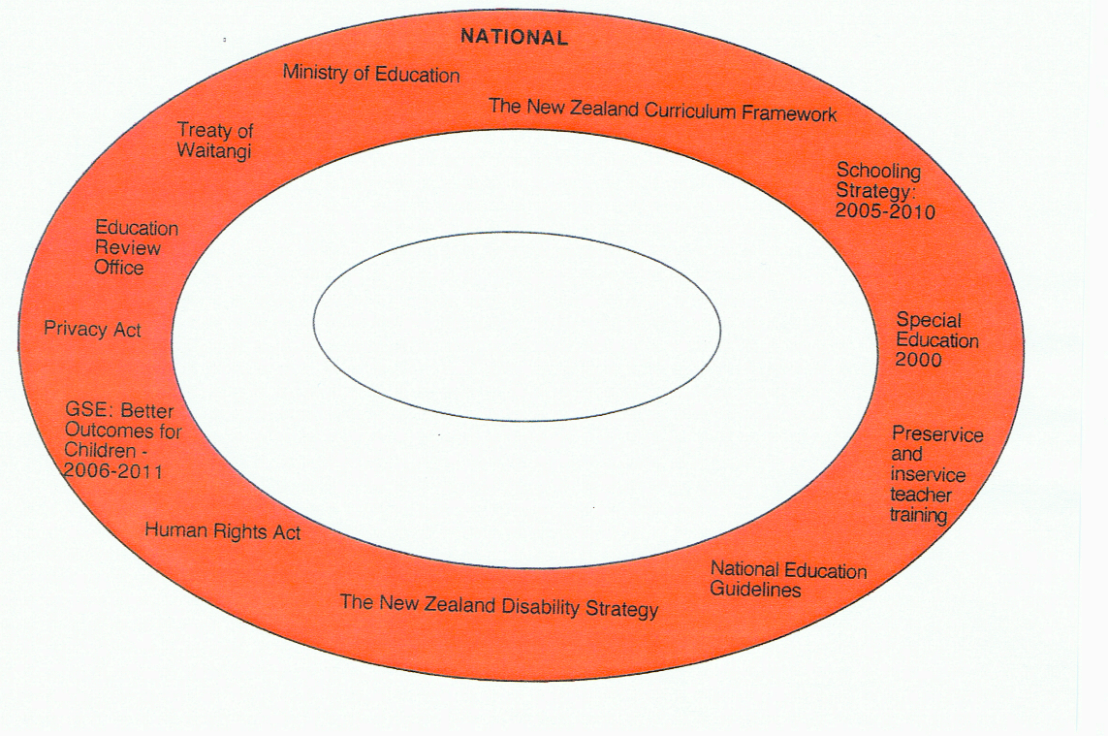
Although the passing of the Education Act gave parents the right to enrol their children at schools within their local community the education system was inadequately funded and organized for the inclusive schooling of children with disability in regular classrooms at this time (Beatson, 2000; Hulston, 2000). Teachers

who did not have training in adapting education programmes were now responsible for including students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Ministry of Education initiatives

Figure 1 details those policies and practices that support partnership at a national level in New Zealand. The introduction of Tomorrow's Schools in the late 1980s embraced the concept of self-managing schools and special education policies and documents reflected this in their underlying principles and suggested practices. The Ministry of Education responded to the changing education environment with a number of initiatives to guide special education reforms (Special Education Service agency set up, 1989; Statement of Intent, 1991; Special Education Policy Implementation Team On Delivering Special Education 1993; Special Education Policy Guidelines, 1995; Special Education 2000 Policy, 1996) and subsequent reviews of such reforms (Picking up the Pieces: Review of Special Education, 2000; Special Education 2000: Monitoring and Evaluation of the Policy,1999-2002). A summary of key initiatives is provided in Appendix A.

Figure 1: Policies and practices that support partnership and inclusion at a national level



Special Education Policy Guidelines

In response to a changing and growing roll of students with disability (both in regular and special schools) the National Advisory Committee on Special Education was established in 1995 and Special Education Policy Guidelines were published. These were reviewed in 1999. The policy guidelines recognised the impact of partnership within the following principles:

- Partnership between parents / caregivers and education providers is essential in overcoming barriers to learning
- All special education resources are used in the most effective and efficient way possible, taking into account parent choice and the needs of the learner
- A learner's language and culture comprise a vital context for learning and development and must be taken into consideration in planning programmes

(Ministry of Education, 2002a, p.36)

These guidelines state the principles, which are the foundation for the Government's Special Education 2000 policy released in 1996. The guidelines clearly focus on partnership between students' families / whanau and education providers and the concept of an inclusive education.

Special Education 2000

The Special Education 2000 policy endorsed the Ministry of Education's aim to achieve " a world class inclusive education system that (would provide) learning opportunities of equal quality to all students" by 2006 (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.5). This policy, which was introduced within the 1996 Budget, introduced new categories of funding and redefined the roles and responsibilities of the support services in health and education that had traditionally worked in isolation from one another (Wylie, 2000). This signaled the establishment of transdisciplinary teams working to meet student needs across a variety of educational, social and health services.

New Zealand Disability Strategy: Making a World of Difference – Whakanui Oranga

In 2001 the Minister of Disability Issues introduced the New Zealand Disability Strategy. The aim of this strategy was to remove barriers to participation faced by

people with disabilities and to create a society that is fully inclusive. Of the fifteen objectives within this strategy, two are particularly relevant to an inclusive education:

> Objective One: Encourage and educate for a non-disabling society: Encourage the emergence of a non-disabling society that respects and highly values the lives of disabled people and supports inclusive communities. (p.11) and
> Objective Three: Provide the best education for disabled people: Improve education so that all children, youth and adult learners will have equal opportunities to learn and develop in their local, regular educational centres. (p.11)

Making a Bigger Difference for all Students: Schooling Strategy 2005-2010

The Ministry of Education's Schooling strategy 2005-2010 identifies three priorities for schooling in New Zealand:

- All students experience effective teaching
- Children's learning is nurtured by families and whanau
- Evidence-based practices are used by all involved in schooling

Within this document families and whanau are recognised as an important resource in nurturing the learning of all students, and therefore, improving their opportunities and outcomes. NZEI feedback to the Schooling Strategy Directions Document states, "Parent teacher partnerships are a central component of a new vision of education" (Ministry of Education, 2005a, p.34).

Key requirements for successful partnership

The New Zealand Special Education 2000 Guidelines recognised the importance of the relationships between parents and teachers of children with a disability, identifying partnership as a fundamental principle. These guidelines defined partnership as involving teachers, parents / caregivers and whanau sharing information and deciding together on the best approaches and learning programmes for the student. In a brochure published for parents of children with disabilities the Ministry of Education identified the following key requirements for a successful partnership:

The partnership with your school will work best when everybody:

- Accepts responsibility for meeting the special education needs of your child

- Has a view on how these needs should be met, however, works together to find the answer
- Works with others in a way that concentrates on your child, not the personalities involved or the relationships
- Presents their views openly, sensitively and honestly
- Shares the responsibility for making decisions
- Seeks to achieve the best outcome for your child
- Deals with problems as they arise

(2002a; p.17)

Review of Special Education 2000

In 2000 Wylie was responsible for a review of the impact of the Special Education 2000 policy. Amongst a number of findings she identified

> a notable gap in the present policy is the provision of information, advice, and support for parents, and guidance for principals and teachers, for the practical working through of issues…. and ensuring sufficient ongoing professional development occurs to widen their understanding of what can be done, and its value. Attitudinal change is vital. (p.35)

Parents identified the need for early, clear, and ongoing information and support, the use and valuing of their knowledge of their child, and for their wishes in regards to appropriate provision for their child to be respected. They wanted school principals and teachers to welcome their children and to meet their legal responsibilities in providing an equitable education for them. They requested a mediation service as support for parents dealing with unwelcoming principals and promoted the idea of an independent tribunal to impose their legal rights with schools.

The introduction of transdisciplinary teams resulted in some confusion in regards to access and provision of services. Fragmentation of service delivery was observed. Due to unclear information and lack of training there appeared to be a number of issues about accountability and resourcing where parents and educators held very different beliefs and expectations, for example the appropriate use of paraprofessional time.

Special Education Review 1999-2001

Over three years a team of 15 researchers evaluated the implementation of *Special Education 2000* focussing on the perceptions and experiences of professionals and families of students with disabilities involved in implementing the policy and experiencing its effects. When the quality of relationships between schools and families was examined three themes were identified:

- Information and communication
- Decision-making and consultation
- The idea and experience of partnership

Information and communication

Parents reported variable experiences in accessing information from schools and the Special Education Service, some saying it took too long to get information, while others questioned the reliability of the information they did receive. A feeling that communication was open, and that information was shared, was identified as a factor that contributed to a sense of partnership. When schools were surveyed almost half felt that they could not improve communication with families, caregivers and whanau of students with special needs, yet 64% of parents surveyed felt they had not been given enough information and half suggested that schools could improve their communication with parents.

Decision making and consultation

By the third year of the review schools had observed an increased involvement of parents at IEP and behaviour plan meetings. They attributed this to the Special Education 2000 policy. During 2000-2001 schools were less likely to report that parents expected too much involvement in their child's programme. However, the review found schools continuing to be ambivalent about the involvement of parents in decisions about funding allocation. Although about three quarters of parents felt they had been able to participate in decisions about their child's programme a number of comments reflected some doubts about whether the consultation was simply paying lip service.

Parents were more likely than schools to think they should be participating in decisions about funding and they were sometimes suspicious about the equitable

allocation of funding and whether or not allocated funding was being spent on their child. This finding correlates closely to those of Wylie (2000). The review states clearly that "funding, whether satisfactory or contested, was pivotal to the sense of partnership" (Bourke, Bevan-Brown, Carroll-Lind, Chapman, Cullen & Kearney, 2002, p.56).

The idea and experience of partnership

In the final phase of the project 90% of parents who responded considered their working relationships with schools were positive. However, the review cautioned that parental views on what they consider constitutes a sense of partnership differs, and that the parents' reports of satisfaction with their involvement with their child's school needs to be appreciated in the context of these views. Parents' expectations of involvement in a partnership were variable, with some happy to be involved regularly, while others felt they were called upon too frequently (Morton & Gibson, 2003). Although the review was able to identify these differing perspectives there is no literature currently available from the Ministry of Education to suggest how parents and educators might develop their understandings of each other's perspectives, or how to apply this new knowledge to better achieve authentic partnerships (Morton & Gibson, 2003).

Policy impact on the profession

The sheer volume of policies and legislation generated within the last twenty years illustrates the significant restructuring undertaken within special education in New Zealand. During this same period of time schools have worked with the Ministry of Education as a new curriculum framework has been established, implemented, reviewed, revised and an amended curriculum has been developed. Educators have worked to understand and implement a raft of curriculum documents and changes within their practice. They have been expected to work with a diverse range of learners with minimal training, mixed education policy messages and "insufficient and inflexible resources" to provide inclusive programmes for all learners (Higgins, MacArthur & Rietveld, 2006). Regardless of these conditions parents, families and professionals are expected to work together in partnership to provide the best outcomes for students with disabilities.

Inclusion and partnerships

Inclusive educational practice promotes effective partnership between stakeholders (families/ whanau, students, teachers, school staff, professionals) as critical to the development of programmes and practices for students with disability (Elsworth, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2002a; 2002b). When partnerships value the diversity of knowledge participants have, they can challenge previously invisible or taken for granted assumptions and practices within education settings. As such they are pivotal to the successful inclusion of all learners (Elsworth, 2003; Fraser, 2000; Moore, Anderson, Timperley, Glynn, Macfarlane & Brown, 1999). The passing of the Education Act (1989) and resulting policies heralded, not only changes in access to education for students, but also recognition of partnerships as an essential component of the inclusion process. The Special Education 2000 Policy Guidelines acknowledge that, although specialist input and support is important, it is the family that knows the child best, and that family would be supported in decision-making through the individual education plan (IEP) process. This process has been pivotal to considerations of partnership in New Zealand (Moltzen, 2000; Morton & Gibson, 2003; Quinn & Ryba, 2000).

The Individual Education Plan (IEP)

The IEP process has been described as a means of promoting effective partnerships between the student and all those involved with them (Ministry of Education, 2007). Parents of a student with a disability would usually attend such a meeting at least every six months to work with educators and other professionals, and if possible, the student, to plan the programme for the student.

When Stringer (1997, cited in Moltzen, 2000) investigated parents' and teachers' perceptions of partnership within the IEP context she found that they saw this as:

- Collaborative teamwork between parents, teachers and others
- Sharing of expertise for the benefit of the child
- Sharing in the decision making and sharing responsibility for outcomes
- A degree of commitment from parents and caregivers

In addition parents stated that:

- Partnerships should be balanced with parents empowered to voice their opinions and have these valued, accepted and acted on; and
- There should be clearer communication between professionals and parents so concerns can be addressed quickly and feedback provided (p.136)

Moltzen suggests that parents may not feel that they are equal partners or that their knowledge has the same value as professionals within this process. Wylie (2000) found that parents often regarded the IEP as a funding and resource allocation document and did not realise that it set out resourcing goals that may not be realised.

Differing perspectives

Although teachers and parents may accept partnership as critical to an inclusive education this process can be challenged by the various meanings and positionings they hold (Elsworth, 2003; Rietveld, 2002). These differences can create barriers to effective communication between team members (Elsworth, 2003) and reveal problems that hinder the quality of the child's inclusive education (Rietveld, 2002).

Obstacles to partnership

Partnerships require a genuine commitment to realising the shared goals of the partnership philosophy. Fraser (2000) identified the following obstacles to partnership:

- Lip service – policies promoting partnership are not realised in practice
- The school as a hostile environment – the physical environment and school practices can be intimidating
- Teacher assumes the role of expert – teacher assumes they alone know what is best for the child
- The student is not respected – they are not included in decisions about their programme, their input is not valued
- Parents are directed as to what to do – decision-making should be shared
- Parents are treated as having a disability – seen as part of the problem rather than part of the solution
- Teachers are not valued – their roles and responsibilities may not be recognised by others

- Parents are put in an overload situation – parents may not wish to participate in extra school activities, the only time they may have as a break from their child could be the school day
- Family are not included – the wider family/whanau should be recognised and given the opportunity to participate if appropriate
- Feelings of parents are not understood – a lack of empathy can promote feelings of isolation and difference

(pp.113-120)

Effective teachers need to be aware of the power of their position if truly reciprocal relationships with parents and families are to occur (Fraser, 2000; Hulston, 2000; Prezant & Marshak, 2006). Fraser suggests that an effective teacher:

- Values people
- Regards others as well intentioned
- Regards others as a source of satisfaction
- Listens well
- Is sincere
- Is honest and
- Is knowledgeable

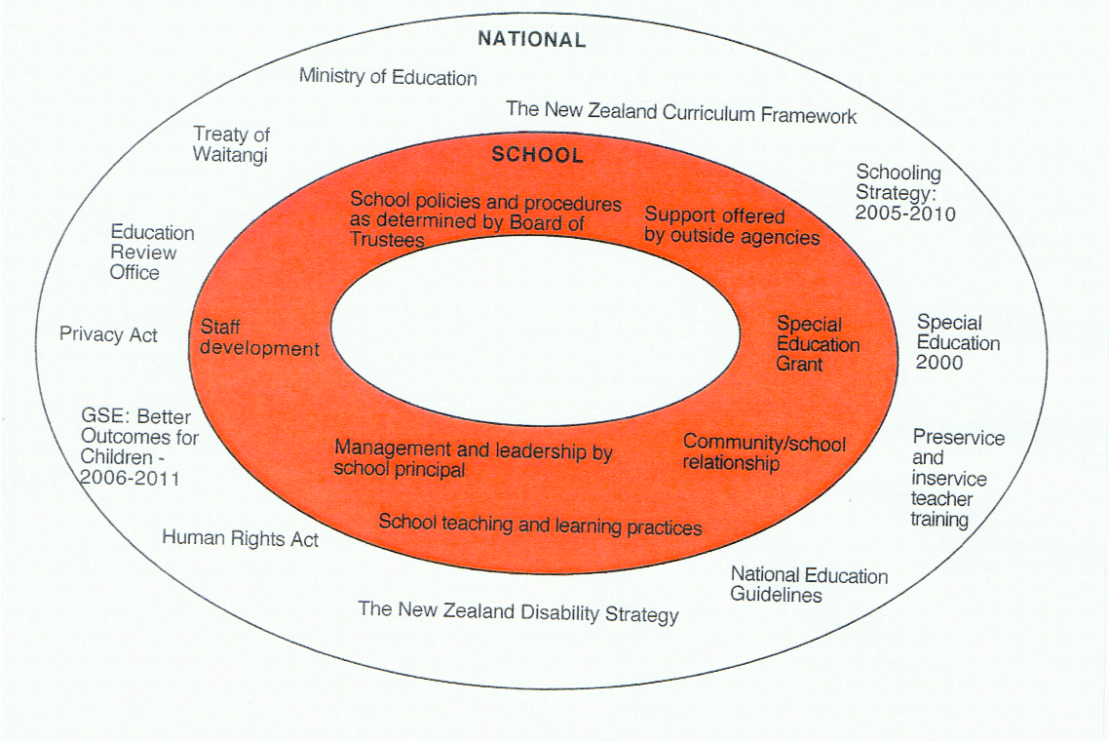
(pp.120-124)

The Draft Evidence-Based Guideline for Autism Spectrum Disorder (Ministries of Health and Education, 2006) identifies negative staff attitudes and a lack of time as the biggest barriers to collaborative teaming. Further to this it posits that skills for effective teams need to be taught, as they are not instinctive.

Schools and partnership

Further to national policies and practices there are a number of school level factors that can support partnership and inclusion between education settings and families of students with disabilities. These are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Policies and practices that support partnership and inclusion at school level



Principals and partnership

When examining collaborative partnerships between schools and homes Ramsay, Hawk, Harold, Marriott and Poskitt (1993) found the role of the principal to be critical in effecting change. They suggest the principal needs to be open minded, flexible, visible to all parties involved and committed to a model of collaboration. Elsworth (2003) emphasises the role that principals can play in leading and creating a culture of partnership. Principals also require the skills to build strong professional learning communities through focussed support of teachers to meet the needs of all learners. They are critical in establishing and developing school cultures which support the learning of both teachers and students, and in leading and managing change (Deppeler, Loreman & Sharma, 2005).

There is a concern that the "desire for inclusion, based on social justice and group democracy, is constantly at odds with the promotion of individual rights, competition and the best learning environment for each child" (Gordon & Morton, in press, p.1). This has resulted in a situation where principals have retreated from building partnerships with parents to concentrate on building efficient and competitive schools

(Kearney & Kane, 2006; Wills, 2006). This is evidenced in the difficulties parents face when exercising their right to access schools of their choice (Bourke et al.,1999; Gordon & Morton, in press).

Board of Trustees and partnership

The introduction of Tomorrow's Schools in 1989 resulted in a shift from state intervention to greater individual responsibility through self-managing schools. Regional Education Boards were replaced by individual school Boards of Trustees elected by that school community's parents. Boards of Trustees and principals were now responsible for local special education provision to students (Wills, 2006).

In 2002 the Ministry of Education published a guide for Boards of Trustees describing their roles and responsibilities in relation to educating students with disabilities. Board members were reminded that as trustees it was their responsibility to:

- Acknowledge and promote that parents, caregivers and families, whanau must be involved with the development, review and implementation of learning programmes and strategies related to their child
- Promote the elements, and short and long-term benefits, of building and maintaining successful partnerships
- Encourage open consultation and communication with and between staff, specialists, parents and caregivers and families, whanau, agencies and the community
- Create an environment where everyone listens to and respects others' points of view
- Ask questions and seek information from boards of other schools and outside expertise to find answers

(2002b, p.9)

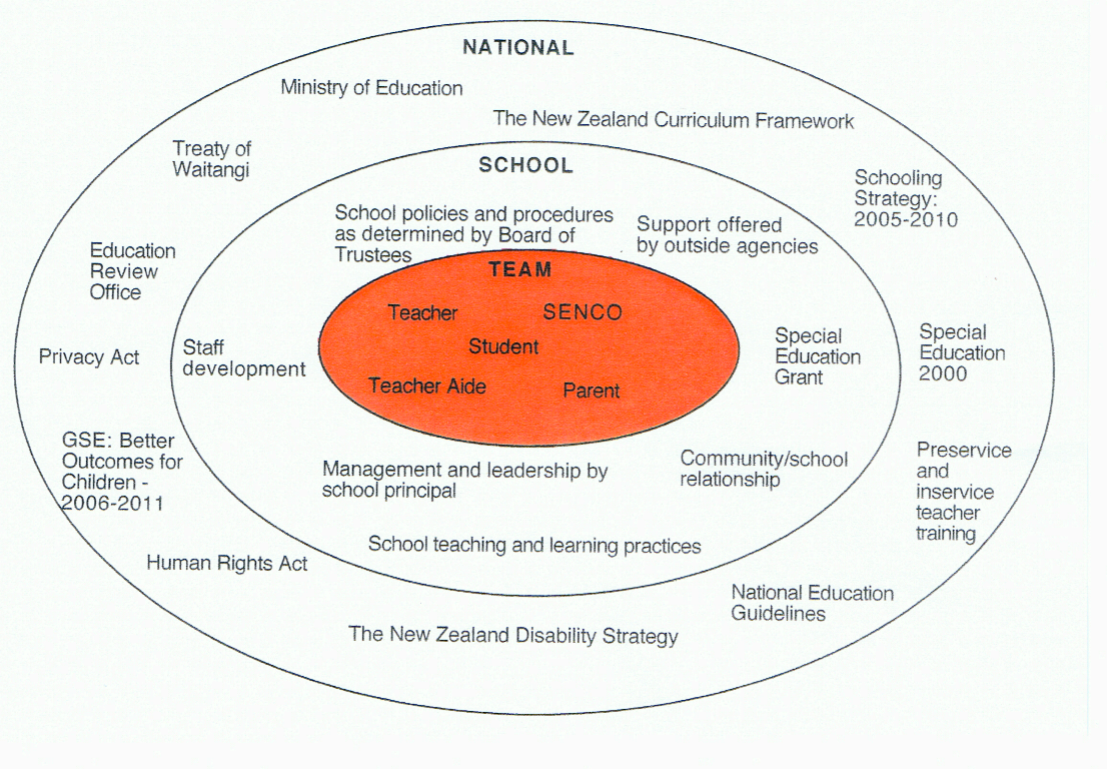
Although schools work under the self managing philosophy there is a recognition that a limited devolution of authority has occurred (Wills, 2006) with education legislation providing a framework for accountability to all schools. It has been observed (Hulston, 2000; Millar & Morton, 2007; Wills, 2006) that there are a number of competing discourses evident within policies and between policies and practices. Boards of Trustees are often in an unenviable position of trying to make sense of, and

be responsive to, expectations of appropriate practice and partnership with parents who have been told their child has the right to a world class education. A further critical element is that of the funding that Boards have to work with to be able to deliver the inclusive education to which students are legally entitled. How can partnership with parents and families of students with disabilities become a reality under such conditions?

The Team

This section focuses on the literature concerning team members at the school (micro) level. This study focused on a team that included a teacher, parent, paraprofessional and SENCO. Descriptions of the team will appear in Chapter Four. Figure 3 presents the team as a further influence on the support of partnership and inclusion practices.

Figure 3: Policies, practices and resources that support partnership and inclusion for team members



Teachers and partnership

The inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms in New Zealand has required that teachers work within partnership roles with families and other professionals. Although it is observed that teachers wish to foster positive working relationships (Elsworth, 2003) there is concern both nationally (Bevan-Brown, 2006; Cameron & Baker, 2004; Morton & Gordon, 2006; Wylie, 2000) and internationally (Booth, Nes & Stromstad, 2003; Garner, 2000; Slee, 2001) that initial teacher education programmes are not preparing teachers fully for these roles. Teachers report that they do not feel prepared or skilled in working with parents (Elsworth, 2003; Hedges, 2001).

Elsworth (2003) identifies a number of issues for teachers who are expected to work in partnerships:

- There is little training or research on the skills and understandings of partnerships for teachers in New Zealand
- Most teacher preparation focuses on teachers interacting with children, not adults
- Teachers lack training in working with students with disabilities and may view these children as "extra"

(p.15)

Often teachers have little or no understanding of family background, or the framework of partnership (Epstein, 1995). They may not possess the skills to work collaboratively (Friend, 2000).

When Cameron, Baker and Lovett (2006) examined the experiences of a group of 57 "promising" teachers reflecting on their early years of their careers they found that, although most of the teachers felt well prepared, one third of the primary and half of the secondary teachers felt their initial teaching education prepared them inadequately for working constructively with parents.

The parent in a team

Historically parents of students with disabilities have been ignored in decision making for their children's education. As educational policy and legislation has evolved there

has been an increasing emphasis on participation and decision making for parents (Hess, Molina & Kozleski, 2006; Pinkus, 2006). However, parental concerns are observed to be ignored or not valued by educators within a variety of settings (Bevan-Brown, 2006; Elsworth, 2003; Hess, Molina & Koleski, 2006; Purdue, 2004; Wills, 2006).

Murray (2000) argues that until the policy, legislation and practice shifts from its present perspective "of viewing disability as the failure of the individual to that of a perspective embracing equality of value for all, relationships between parents and professionals will be fraught with difficulties" (p.683). When Prezant and Marshank (2006) surveyed parents of children with disabilities about the particular actions they would like professionals to take in the future, over half of the respondents desired relationships within teams that focussed on respect, collaboration, communication and information sharing.

The paraprofessional in a team

Paraprofessional is a term that can be used to describe a learning support assistant or a teacher aide. Paraprofessionals work within a variety of roles in education and their support can be critical in hindering or helping a student with disabilities to be fully included within a regular school (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Lacey, 2001; MacArthur & Dight, 2000). The importance of paraprofessionals as a bridge between teachers' and students' and their families' cultures is documented (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, Aragon, Bernal, Berg de Balderas & Carroll, 2004; Rueda & DeNeve, 1999). Parents often report positive experiences with the paraprofessionals working with their children and regard the paraprofessional as their first and most regular contact at school. Yet research investigating collaborative partnerships in inclusion often ignores the role of the paraprofessional (Chopra et al., 2004).

The student in a team

There is a growing recognition that, if education is to be truly inclusive and student centred, then including students with disabilities in their own educational decision making is desirable (Carrington & Holm, 2005; Moore & Duff, 2006). Murray (2000) suggests that the child with disabilities should be positioned as "chief partner" within this process. Further to this Carrington and Holm (2005) detail processes employed at

a secondary state high school where the students directed school wide changes in inclusion.

The Special Education Needs Coordinator in a team

Hess et al. (2006) suggest that the role of the special education teacher (or SENCO) can be one of a "bridge in helping families understand and navigate complicated educational systems" (p.149). I would also suggest that the SENCO can work as a bridge between the class teacher and family helping teachers to understand and navigate complicated family/ health/ social service systems.

Although the SENCO position is usually held by a trained teacher, not all SENCO have special education qualifications. As this position is relatively new within New Zealand (it is a recommendation from the Wylie Review that all schools employ a SENCO) at the time of this project I was unable to find any research about SENCOs in the New Zealand context, let alone within the context of partnership.

There is some research being undertaken to support and guide teams of professionals and parents tackling the day to day issues of inclusion for students with ASD. The following section outlines some key initiatives which may support such teams.

Supporting the inclusion of children with ASD

The Draft Evidence-Based Guideline for Autism Spectrum Disorder (Ministries of Health and Education, 2006) is an evidence-based summary that investigates the identification and diagnosis of ASD, ongoing assessment and access to interventions and services for individuals with ASD. It aims "to provide best evidence available to assist informed decision making to improve health, educational and social outcomes for individuals with ASD" (p.7).

The Draft Guideline recognizes the importance of partnership between families and professionals, advocating a collaborative and reciprocal relationship. Findings include:

- Regardless of the intervention, implementing it across home, early childhood, school and community settings is important to the outcomes

- When skills are targeted in individual plans the family / whanau routines need to be recognized and accommodated within interventions
- Decisions about intervention and intensity should be informed by a skilled team and reflect the child's developmental stage, characteristics and family preferences
- Families should be involved in the development of priority goals and intervention plans
- Goals should be functional and consider family preferences

Maori perspectives on ASD

When consulting with Maori families of children with ASD Bevan-Brown (2004) found parents frequently identified the lack of knowledge about ASD among teachers and support staff as a barrier to providing effective care and education for their children.

When the Draft Evidence-Based Guideline for Autism Spectrum Disorder researchers investigated Maori perspectives on ASD a lack of empirical evidence was identified. Five hui were held to share views and opinions. When discussing access to education respondents wished to participate more fully in educational decision-making. They wanted a more streamlined approach across educational programmes, especially when dealing with transitions and they would like families to be given the choice of where IEP meetings could be held.

Barriers to participating in educational decision-making were:

- Having to fill out application forms to gain help
- A high number of assessments being undertaken
- Lack of funding for students with moderate needs
- Schools being hostile and "special needs phobic"
- Use of jargon by professionals
- Number of professionals involved
- Lack of resources, e.g. not having transport
- Negative emotions including grief and anger about diagnosis
- Negative educational experience of parents

(p.180)

Good practice points from the hui included:

- Develop information packages in health, education and disability services
- Provide ASD information in English and Te Reo Maori and distribute through Maori and mainstream providers of health, education, and disability services
- Consider the appointment of a kaiarahi who would work in conjunction with, and be supported across, the health, education and disability sectors
- Develop a programme of empirical research that would provide baseline information on the subject of Maori and ASD

(p.188)

Ministry of Education initiatives

In recent years the Ministry of Education has contracted research on understanding Maori perspectives of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (Bevan-Brown, 2004), an evaluation of types of services provided to students with ASD in various educational settings, their costs and effectiveness (Godfrey, Moore, Fletcher-Finn & Anderson, 2002) and has provided a resource booklet (Ministry of Education, 2000) and a web site guide (www.minedu.govt.nz) for education personnel working with these students. Further to this, the Ministry of Education and its Autism Spectrum Disorder Advisory Reference Group has conducted a two year action research project into Effective Practice for Children and Young People with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Publication of this research was due to be released in 2005 (personal communication, MOE, 2005b), but at the time of writing it was not available for reading. An evaluation of the Early Bird programme has been published (Anderson, Birkin, Seymour & Moore, 2006).

Autism New Zealand Inc. in conjunction with the Ministry of Education has been undertaking a series of professional development courses throughout New Zealand on recognising the needs of children and young people with Autism and Asperger Syndrome. Participation in this course is limited to Resource teachers, ORRS teachers, Learning Support teachers and Early Intervention teachers. Currently professionals and families supporting children with ASD are being offered the opportunity to take part in 'tips for autism', a Ministry of Education funded programme that offers a team approach to supporting the inclusion of such children (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Relevance to Teaching and Learning

My study is relevant to the teaching and partnership practices of classroom teachers and parents working to support the inclusion of their children with ASD. It will allow us to examine both intended and actual practice, that is, what is actually happening and what should or could be happening (Cardno, 2003). Although my project is situated within one school, focusing on one student, it may provide other teachers working in regular classrooms with knowledge of an alternative partnership model and the potential effectiveness of such a model. Meyer (2001) endorses the recognition of the failures or limitations within studies as valuable information and it is proposed that, if problems arise, they will be acknowledged and adaptations to the programme, school organisation, teaching strategies or other areas of concern will be made.

Rationale for the study

In my years working within special and general education roles I have become increasingly aware of the challenges working in partnerships with others present. Although I endorse the inclusive policies that guide education in Aotearoa /New Zealand I have often found it difficult to transform these policies into practice, to provide the best learning opportunities for students. My study is an opportunity to explore the literature on inclusion and partnerships and to reflect on the effectiveness of my role as a SENCO.

Context of the Study

My particular study is a case study of one of my students. It is used to highlight the impact of special education policies at the school level for a particular child with ASD. The focus of my study is to explore the process of partnership for including the case study child in the regular classroom.

Research Questions

Two research questions are identified.

How do participants make sense of working together to support the inclusion of a student with ASD?

What do participants identify as processes or strategies that facilitate or hinder the partnership process?

A further consideration for me is how effective is the partnership model, the Quality Learning Circle, as a tool to facilitate partnership for families and professionals supporting the inclusion of children with disabilities?

As a teacher working within the field of special education I hope to gain an understanding of the way in which my participation in such a group is shaped by, and contributes to, the process of inclusion for the student. I have a focus on improving my future practice through knowledge gained from this exercise.

Outline of Chapters

Chapter One has identified key policies and initiatives that have supported the notion of partnership between education settings and families of students with disabilities. It investigated the roles of people within such partnerships and identified recent research undertaken to support the inclusion of students with ASD in their regular schools. Chapter Two is the first of two methodology chapters. In this chapter I introduce the methodology used to gather and analyse data for the study. Chapter Three, introduces the Quality Learning Circle (QLC) partnership model which was utilised in this study. In Chapter Four, the first of the findings chapters, I introduce the participants (sample) who worked together within this project. In Chapter Five I discuss the participants' learning journeys, identifying strategies that promoted engagement and those challenges the participants recognised within the QLC. The experience of partnership for the participants is discussed in Chapter Six, and examples of the impact of partnership on practice are provided. In Chapter Seven I provide a summary of findings identifying key conditions for authentic partnership. This chapter also examines the use of a QLC in contrast to the more traditional Individual Education Plan (IEP) process to support authentic partnership. Chapter Eight discusses the implications of this research for teachers, parents and children with a disability and identifies further areas of research.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This study was designed to explore and document the experiences of a group of adults working collaboratively to support the inclusion of a student with ASD at his local school. Although the development of an adapted curriculum for the student was essential to the project, my focus was specifically to investigate the processes used by the adults to make this happen. My major goal was to record the experiences of those involved in the learning community and the implications of their experiences for future practice.

This is the first of three methodology chapters. In this chapter I will discuss the research paradigm in which my study is situated. I will justify the methodology and methods of data gathering. This will include discussion on the processes used in setting up the study, and the issues and challenges I addressed in the design of my study.

A socio-political discourse

This project is situated within a socio-political model of disability. This model proposes that disability is not the result of a person's impairment, but rather of the disabling social-cultural barriers in society (Minister for Disability Issues, 2001; Purdue, 2004). Disability is defined, not as an individual deficit requiring intervention, but as a societal creation (Macartney, 2007).

A socio-political discourse challenges traditional methods of research of, and with, families and people with disabilities (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Mercer, 2002; Purdue, 2004). Historically research has been carried out *on* people with disabilities rather than *with* them, with scant attention being paid to the influence of researchers on perpetuating negative stereotypes of disability (Morton, 2007; Purdue, 2004). Studies have focussed on the researcher's terms with little consideration being given to the impact, relevance and suitability of the research methods on those involved (Park, Meyer & Goetz, 1998; Rietveld, 2002). Although teachers, students, parents and support staff have been involved in research projects, it has been as the objects of

the research rather than stakeholders who have a vested interest in the process and outcomes of such research. Further to this, decision making within research has been the acknowledged domain of the researcher (Park et al., 1998).

Research agendas now require closer scrutiny to determine the relevance of research to those being studied (Turnball, Friesen & Ramirez, 1998). Considerations include identifying whose needs are being met and why the research is being carried out (Armstrong & Moore, 2004).

Armstrong and Moore (2004) advocate constant questioning during research activities to monitor democratic practice. Such questions could include:

- Why am I doing this project rather than something else?
- In whose interests is this project?
- What connection has it to developing inclusive cultures and practices?
- Am I consulting others involved as far as I reasonably can?
- Does it actually challenge existing practices which shore up exclusions and, if so, what are the implications?

(p.8)

Inclusive practice promotes consultation and collaboration with the research stakeholders (Armstrong & Moore, 2004) and it has been suggested that research undertaken without such consultation is a waste of time (Oliver, 1997). With these considerations in mind I chose to work within action research, and participatory action research to investigate the process of partnership for the participants in this study.

Action Research

An action research approach was used because it allowed me to work with issues that I saw as relevant to my work. I wanted any research I undertook to make a difference for the families and professionals with whom I was working. I also wanted to work collaboratively alongside others. This approach appealed to me because it allowed me to ask questions I wanted answers to. Its focus on identifying issues or areas of need, implementing change, evaluating and reflecting on further need (Schmuck, 2006; Somekh, 2006; Sorsby, 2004) supported the meaningful form of inquiry I desired.

Action research can be seen as a fluid process where, although there is an identifiable focus and purpose, the outcomes are not predetermined and unexpected happenings are reflected upon rather than being discarded. Consultation and collaboration are pivotal within this process, but that is not to say they are unproblematic. As such this approach enabled us to investigate our learning community partnership without preconceived ideas of the outcome of the project. Our experiences within this study might therefore give others insight into the challenges and strategies that support authentic partnership.

There are many variations of action research. In the next section I will discuss Participatory Action Research.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a collaborative approach to undertaking research and it is recognised as one means of minimising the gap between research and practice (Meyer, Park, Grenot-Sheyer, Schwartz & Harry, 1998; Morton & MacArthur, 2002). The PAR process involves researchers and stakeholders taking part in the decision making process from the beginning of the project, through to its conclusions and any subsequent actions which arise from the project (Park, Gonsier-Gerdin, Hoffman, Whaley & Yount, 1998). Unlike action research, PAR is specifically characterised by shared ownership of research, community based analysis of social problems and an orientation towards community action (Cardno, 2003; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

PAR demands that all participants reflect on the changes occurring and decisions that need to be made before further work is undertaken. Participants work together in the decision making process to investigate questions that are meaningful to them and they have the opportunity to address problems related to the implementation of research as they work. Thus research findings are ecologically and practically valid in the real environment making it more likely that innovative practices will be transferred into the educational environment (Park et al., 1998). This approach appealed to learning community participants who were focussed on working together to problem solve. We needed to find practical solutions to our problems and to use strategies that could help the student long after the study was completed.

As with action research, the key features of Participatory Action Research may be presented within a spiralling cyclic framework of planning, action and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). This is not to say that such research fits neatly into stages. The stages may overlap and original thinking may be challenged early in the PAR process so that previous plans may become obsolete.

Kemmis and McTaggart's (2005) criterion for judging the success of PAR is relevant to this study. They state that the

> "criterion for success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully but rather whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understandings of their practices, and the situations in which they practice"
>
> (p.563).

This Participatory Action Research study has drawn on the use of both interpretative or qualitative, (Quality Learning Circle) and post-positivist, or quantitative (behavioural intervention) methodologies. Multiple methods were used because part of the work of the partners was to produce some technical knowledge on which to base their decisions.

Meyer (2001) suggests three knowledge areas within a multi method research for application for improved practice which are:

- Technical knowledge, that is, analytical or quantitative knowledge which can provide empirical support for observable changes in behaviour associated with one another,
- Practical knowledge, that is, interpretative or qualitative knowledge, the emphasis being on how meaningful something is, and
- Reflective knowledge, that is, developing interventions that will make a social decision (e.g. inclusion) a reality, thus turning a value in to practice (p.13)

The overarching approach to this study is interpretive, that is, Meyer's idea of practical knowledge. Although my study was interested in the programme developed by the learning community members, the larger interest for me was the opportunity to

study both the participants' experiences of being in the learning community and their understandings of the process. The interpretive researcher seeks understanding through qualitative methods, striving for understanding, on a personal level, of the motives and beliefs behind people's actions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). A qualitative methodology which utilizes data that is "rich in description of people, places and conversations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.2) provided me with the opportunity to capture and reflect the learning community members' experiences through the use of such methods as discussions, diaries, meetings and interviews.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) identify qualitative methods employed by action researchers as promoting social change through the use of dialogue about "their analysis of observed and reported events and activities" (p.38). The Quality Learning Circle (QLC) approach, which is used within this project, is one such method. Its focus on working collaboratively to determine best practice fits comfortably within the participatory action research paradigm within which this study is situated.

I could not find any research where a QLC approach engaged participants from home and school settings. Until data collection and analysis was undertaken it was difficult for me to predict which aspects of the learning community process would be significant. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that when you use qualitative methods "you are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture which takes shape as you collect and examine the parts" (p.6).

I drew on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) who promote grounded theory as a significant aspect of qualitative research. The grounded theory approach suggests that theory is created from, or emerges from, data rather than data being used to fit predetermined ideas. This inductive approach requires the researcher to move from observation to theory generation (Davidson & Tolich,1999). Data is collected using a variety of methods. It is coded and analysed and key concepts are identified. Those concepts may be verified through further data collection and analysis.

The critical friend

As a teacher who had primarily been involved in behavioural work within special

education, I realised early in my planning that I would need someone not directly involved in the project to support me as I worked within the participatory action research process that was unfamiliar to me. I needed a critical friend. Costa and Kallick (1993) describe a critical friend as

> a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens and offers critique of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work. (p.50)

I was aware of Mills' (2003) caution against having too many critical friends giving various points of view and decided that one knowledgeable critical friend would meet this need. A priority for me was a critical friend who had a good understanding of the participatory action research process. My supervisors helped me identify such a person and, although we did not meet on many occasions, his support was invaluable.

Data collection

Data was gathered from six main sources: a) semi- structured interviews; b) participant journals; c) fieldnotes; d) meeting minutes; e) the instructor diary, and; f) e-mails.

As a multi-method project a range of other data was collected (Individual Education Plans, medical and academic assessments, paediatric reports, time out logs, daily lesson plans and results, pre and post intervention assessments). The use of these extra data is relevant to the intervention, but not to the focus of this study. Therefore, a discussion of these data is not warranted within this report.

Interviews

I considered the semi-structured interview, which can be similar to a conversation, provided the best opportunity for me to explore the pertinent issues for the participants and to allow them the chance to reflect on their experiences within the group. As a practitioner who had not worked with qualitative data gathering methods before, the interview was a new experience for me. I felt more comfortable working

within a semi-structured setting, rather than a formal or open-ended one where I may have limited the amount of useful data gathered through restrictive interviewing or forgetting to ask questions central to my inquiry.

Following Mills (2003) recommendation I piloted the questions (used the interview guide questions) with a person who worked within education and had a child with special education needs. This gave me the opportunity to practise using the interview guide, to check if the questions made sense and if the language I used was ambiguous or not.

Each team member was interviewed on two occasions, once at the beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study. Participants were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes each time and I offered participants the option of where they would like to be interviewed.

Each participant gave verbal permission for their interview to be audio taped. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Written transcripts were returned to the participants and they were invited to modify or edit any of the transcripts and to provide feedback in written form. They were also asked to verify that the transcript was indeed a true and correct record of the interview. They did so in writing and the verified transcript was filed with other data.

Meeting minutes

Four formal meetings for the participants were held throughout the period of the study. I participated in the meetings and wrote notes that served as minutes. These minutes were typed on to the computer, printed, and distributed to team members for feedback, allowing for any information to be deleted or added as issues were raised by those who had attended the meetings. The notes also served as a reminder of issues or a focus for the following meetings.

Field notes

Field notes were my descriptions and my interpretations of meetings, interactions and observations of working within the school and home. These may have been written in my journal, the instructor diary, on meeting minutes or entered on to my computer as

I worked.

Journals

I provided journals for each member of the learning community (A4 exercise books) to record their thoughts, observations, questions and comments on the research process, the intervention and the learning community itself. I introduced a journal to the school staff not involved in the study and left the journal in the staff room for the length of the intervention. I collected these journals at the end of the data gathering phase. Prior to the journals being distributed I discussed their potential use with participants and also typed a note which was glued to the front inside cover of the journal providing my e-mail address if participants would rather make electronic entries.

Researcher journal

My research journal recorded my thoughts and reflections on the research process, its design, the learning community process and issues that I felt were paramount at various stages during the study. Notes were recorded in blue pen and any issues that I felt needed following up were written in red pen. Notes were made after meetings, phone calls, observations, informal conversations and interviewing. This process provided me with an audit trail so that I could link the origins of ideas to specific conversations, people and situations. It also provided me with questions that I used in e-mails or as follow up at meetings with my supervisors. Following meetings with my supervisors or/and my critical friend I wrote notes to myself and questions that I needed to follow up independently.

Home - school communication book

A book has been used between home and school during the time the student has been enrolled at the school. The book detailed student achievements, time out data, and informal observations made by the paraprofessional, teacher and parent. It is also used for home or school members to clarify issues, set meeting dates, and to raise day-to-day issues for the family/ student/ class/ staff. This book continued to be used during the length of the study and I collected it as data at the conclusion of the data gathering phase.

Instructor diary

The instructor diary was designed by learning community participants as a daily record of lessons undertaken with the student. It was a means of providing a record of lessons taught so that any team member could pick up the book and see quickly what had been completed and what was the next step in learning. As such it was designed to support the intervention. However, members began to use it as a communication tool, to record informal thoughts and observations, and to raise questions for the group to consider. I collected the diary at the end of the data gathering phase.

e-mails

I encouraged group members to use e-mails if they preferred this method of communicating to other group members including myself. None of the members used e-mails in this way during the study. I kept e-mails sent to and from my supervisors, my critical friend and such agencies as the Ministry of Education. Copies of the e-mails sent and received from the beginning of the project through to my writing of the thesis were printed and filed in an A4 folder. They were also stored on an iPod shuffle.

Analysis of data

Data were analysed inductively throughout the study. I had collected multiple sources of data, which I used to identify emerging themes. Exploratory data analysis took place throughout the study and my ideas and reflections were shared with the other participants, my supervisors and my critical friend. As a researcher who had never worked within a qualitative methodology I was mindful of Taylor and Bogdan's (1998) concerns that significant theorizing comes with experience. Therefore, I drew on the skills and experiences of my supervisors and critical friend to reflect on my interpretations and use of data.

As the study progressed and some key concepts emerged, I was able to narrow the focus of the data categories when further data collection and analysis was undertaken. This strategy, the constant comparative method (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), enabled me to handle a wide range of data in a focused manner.

The data was coded manually with transcripts, observations and meeting minutes

photocopied. Statements were highlighted in various colours depending on coding categories. As data analysis progressed categories and sub-categories were added, collapsed, expanded and redefined so that the enduring categories were the ones that best reflected the data. As the data collection ceased, more formal data analysis was undertaken with constant revisiting of data for themes and patterns relevant to the research questions. Though time consuming, I found this process illuminated themes that I had not recognized earlier.

Once I had identified patterns and themes I attempted to find out how others had experienced partnership within the process of including their children/students in schools. I wished to explore whether the experiences of my study participants were consistent with or challenged those detailed in the literature.

Issues: validity, trustworthiness and ethics

Issues that need to be considered by researchers are those of validity, trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

Validity and trustworthiness

Validity requires us to ask whether the instruments or questions we use actually measure the concept being researched (Cardno, 2003; Hittleman & Simon, 2002). It is concerned with trustworthiness (Mertler, 2006). Using Guba's (1981) criteria for the validity of action research I implemented an audit trail so that I could establish confidence in the validity of my work.

The credibility of the study was established through prolonged participation at the study setting (Guba, 1981; Mills, 2003). This was further enhanced because I was a staff member at the school and would continue working with staff and families after the completion of the study. A further consideration was the sharing of data analysis with the participants (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Somekh, 2006). Participants were given copies of transcripts or observations and asked for their feedback. This is called member checking (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Sharing data with the participants enabled me to check that my interpretations were a fair representation of them and their ideas.

I kept notes about what and how things were done within the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Guba, 1981). Data collection and analysis procedures were planned and presented to my supervisors and the Christchurch College of Education Human Ethics committee prior to the commencement of the study. During the study period I delivered a presentation to a forum of my peers and received feedback from a discussant panel about the design and implementation of the project.

I attempted to identify researcher biases and assumptions within the project (Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The use of triangulation and practice of reflexivity strengthened the objectivity of the data (Cardno, 2003). Reflexivity is the recognition of "underlying assumptions or bias that cause the researcher to formulate a set of questions in a particular way and to present findings in a particular way" (Mills, 2003, p.80). The use of a research journal supported this consideration.

The agenda for the research and subsequent actions were negotiated with all the participants (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Somekh, 2006). This included acknowledging areas of subjectivity through regular discussion. This was further enhanced through shared roles and the development of a learning programme, which was shaped by all participants.

Ethics

Inclusive ideology and practices demand a collaborative approach to problem solving where both practical inquiry and rigour are addressed to meet the needs of people with disabilities. This research was undertaken in response to a student whose inclusion at school was seriously threatened by his behaviour and our inability to provide best practice to meet his needs. I held a belief that our practices had to change and I endeavoured to implement change, which can be frightening to a person with ASD, in as supportive a manner as possible. We used methods identified as successful teaching strategies with students with ASD (visual schedules, social stories and visual prompts in discussions). Decisions were made in consultation with, (among others), his mother who was the most knowledgeable person about understanding her child's needs.

This research was undertaken in a small rural town where both the student and myself were well known. The student's specific disability means he is a member of a very small and easily identifiable group of people within the rural area. Further to this, his behaviour and actions have led to him being well known within a number of schools. I am well known within the education community. The use of pseudonyms and promises of confidentiality were undertaken, but are no guarantee that the school and student will not be easily identified, especially as findings from the study are published (Cardno, 2003). Study participants did not share my concerns about such issues. They perceived the need to solve the behaviour issues and enhance the student's inclusion as primary and did not give weight to issues of identification. However, I have endeavoured to consider all aspects of ethics within my work and to fulfil my responsibilities as a researcher within this study.

The study met the ethical standards set out by the Christchurch College of Education. Following Davidson and Tolich's (1999) guidelines I ensured that all members of the learning community were given information about the project and were asked if they wished to participate in it without pressure being placed on them (no deceit, voluntary participation). Prior to the study being undertaken I approached the school principal, presented an information sheet (Appendix B) and discussed the project with her. I attended a Board of Trustees meeting where the same information sheet was presented. Board members had the opportunity to ask me any questions about issues they may have had. The Board of Trustees and principal were required to sign consent forms (Appendix C and D) allowing school staff to be involved in the study (informed consent).

Participants were given a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix E) and were required to sign a consent form (Appendix F) that clearly stated the specific requirements of all participants (informed consent). I found it more difficult to ascertain clearly how to ensure that the student actually understood the concept of informed consent and to gain his consent honestly. Like Gywnn (2004), I found myself unsure of the protocol to use when advocating for a participatory research process with a student who has a disability. I discussed this with my supervisors and made the following decisions. The student was presented with an information sheet (Appendix G) about the programme which entailed a number of changes to his daily

schedule. I used language that I hoped would not be ambiguous to him and highlighted the main points only so as not to confuse him. I read the information sheet with him and we discussed the changes to his schedule. I let him know he could discuss any issues with his mother, teacher or paraprofessional. His mother also discussed the changes to his schedule and asked him if he wanted to know anything more. It was important to me that he understood that the project was one which would be shared with people outside of the school and that he would not be identified as the student we had worked with. An information sheet was provided to the student's mother (Appendix H). The student signed a student consent form and his mother signed this form (Appendix I) to provide written consent for her son to take part in the study, stating that she had discussed it with him and that she was satisfied that he understood what was required of him.

Data have been shared and will continue to be shared with participants as it is prepared for publication within this thesis.

Time frame

Data were gathered over a five-month period from August to December 2005. Interviews were undertaken in August and December. Meetings took place in August, October, November and December 2005. Participants worked together for 13 weeks, and with the student for 11 weeks from mid September to the end of the school year in December 2005. The project timetable (Appendix J) presents the timeline for teaching and data gathering during the project.

Summary

This chapter has discussed those methodologies and methods employed to address the study's research questions. Action and participatory action research have been introduced, described and justified as the appropriate approach to meet the aims of my study. The use of qualitative grounded theory methodology and means of data collection and analysis have been outlined. Issues related to validity, trustworthiness and the ethics of the study have also been presented. The following two methodology chapters will introduce the participants and the partnership model used within the study.

Chapter 3

The Quality Learning Circle

This methodology chapter introduces the Quality Learning Circle (QLC) model that was used within this study to enact a partnership between family and professionals to support a student with ASD to stay at school. The QLC is positioned within the wider learning partnership and learning community literature and its specific features are discussed. A rationale for the use of this model is provided. Adaptations made to the traditional QLC model within this study are also described.

Principles underpinning a learning partnership

Learning partnerships are collaborative relationships where learning and knowledge are mutually constructed (Allen, 2007; Fullan, 2007). All members in a learning partnership are active participants in developing shared knowledge and understandings of practices and concepts. Such understandings are developed through regular communication, the chance to plan, share ideas, observe them in practice and reflect on the impact of practice on student achievement. Adopting new work practices may be a result of such partnerships (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Learning partnerships focus on group participants taking responsibility for their own and the group's learning.

Learning partnerships have been addressed in the school improvement literature. Terms such as "communities of learners" and "learning communities" have been adopted.

Learning communities

For the purpose of this study I take up Stoll and Louis' (2007) definition of a (professional) learning community as

> An inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other, finding ways, inside and outside their immediate community, to enquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches that will enhance all pupils' learning. (p.6)

Stoll and Louis (2007) state that it has been a core assumption that the group's objective is "not to improve teacher morale, teacher or technical skills, but to make a difference for students" (p.3).

There is growing recognition (Bolam, Stoll & Greenwood, 2007; Mitchell & Sackney, 2007; Stoll & Louis, 2007) that the traditional learning community which has focused on teachers as participants may not be sufficient to serve the needs of all students. Learning communities may include key people such as paraprofessionals (Bolam, Stoll & Greenwood, 2007), parents (Stoll & Louis, 2007) and students (Carrington & Holm, 2005). Such stakeholders may bring new and divergent knowledge bases to a learning community, thus providing schools with information and views that may better contribute to the students' and the participants' learning.

The Quality Learning Circle as a variation of a learning community

A Quality Learning Circle (QLC) can be defined as a collaborative learning community that is "able to draw its members together through a shared commitment and focus for learning, meeting on a regular basis to enhance their work practices" (Lovett, 2002, p.101). As such it can be viewed as a learning partnership where sharing is central to the construction of new knowledge.

The special features of a QLC

Although the QLC model originated within American industry during the 1960s it has been used as a tool to enhance teacher learning within New Zealand schools since the 1990s.

Stewart and Prebble (1993) adapted the American model to use in education and, in doing so, described the QLC model as having the following features:

- Selection of a common theme for exploration
- Discussion and story telling within the group experiences related to the theme
- Observation in classrooms to enhance the meaning of the stories
- Discussion of these observations in pairs, then with the whole group
- Sharing examples of practice within the group

They also suggest the model should draw its members from staff who represent a heterogeneous cross section of the school, with selection being across age, and subject boundaries, if possible.

The QLC is a learner directed approach, promoting a collegial style where small groups of teachers meet to develop their professional practice and provide support for each other in their learning. Frequent meetings are held to discuss a selected theme and what it means for classroom practice. Focusing on the selected theme, QLC members observe each other in classroom practice. During these observation visits it is the observer who is the learner. This is a departure from traditional teacher learning models where the teacher being observed would be the learner. Further to the observations, group meetings focus on discussion and reflection in order to create new meanings about classroom practice (Lovett & Verstappen, 2004).

The QLC approach promotes the notion that participants are active learners who shape their own learning choices. Such a journey may be regarded as learning occurring on the "edge of chaos" (Lovett, 2002, p.101). This is because rather than relying on others to provide learning choices, the group is responsible for sharing, reflecting and choosing its future learning needs. There may be some uncertainty about outcomes, hence the reference to learning at the edge of chaos. These elements are inherent in the practices of the group throughout this study.

Rationale for using a Quality Learning Circle

The decision to use a QLC to support the learning of participants within this study was made with consideration of a number of issues: the problem of working in isolation, shared responsibility for decision making, learning centred in practice, alternative sources of professional development and management support.

Prior to the study, although we all worked regularly within the same school with the case study student, our work was often in isolation from each other. Such isolation could be physical or social. I recognised that this situation was not unique to the school I was working in. The busyness of schools may reinforce such isolation, thus creating a barrier to collaboration (Friend & Cook, 1992). The QLC offered and

valued opportunities for discussing, sharing and observing - activities we were trying to squeeze into our days with little or no time to reflect and discuss further.

The QLC can be viewed as a partnering venture where all members have equal responsibility. The QLC model appealed to me because I wished to work within a collaborative environment where all participants could share in choosing resources, decision making and taking responsibility, both for their own learning and for the case study student's school programme.

I recognised my preference for learning centred in practice. I wished to explore strategies, resources and experiences within a team to problem solve the challenges of inclusion within our school. I wanted the new learning we undertook to result in a productive change in our practices. The additional benefit of working within a team to do so offered opportunities for learning and professional development.

Aside from annual attendance at a professional development course of my choice all my professional learning was being undertaken privately, usually within tertiary study. I was interested in alternative avenues of professional development and the potential of a QLC to support such learning. I was particularly interested in how participants could support each other in their learning within the school setting. I saw the potential of the QLC model as a way of being a learner within a community of learners (QLC).

A final consideration was the receptiveness of management to using a QLC within the school. I discussed the use of a QLC within the school with the principal and was given full support to proceed.

Adaptations to the QLC model

Although the QLC model had been used in teacher appraisal (Lovett & Verstappen, 2004; Smith, 2005) and professional development (Lovett & Gilmore, 2003), I began to consider how it could be adapted to support a team of people working together to address the challenges of inclusion.

The QLC traditionally had teaching staff as its members and learning usually occurred within a specific educational institution (although Lovett's 2002 study utilised members from a range of schools). My study differed in that it was focused on participants from both home and school environments working together. The team encompassed three members who worked within the school and one member from the student's family. Participants who were school staff had varying careers, experience and responsibilities. The student's mother had never worked in a school.

Implementation of a QLC has usually occurred with at least one member of the team having experience of the approach (Lovett, 2002) or the team having the benefit of a mentor who has knowledge of the QLC process (Lovett & Verstappen, 2004). As none of the participants, including myself, had ever been part of a QLC we had to decide how we could best fashion the model to suit our needs and focus.

This was essential because the QLC was diverse in its membership, members' focus on learning, and the environments it could function within. Although everyone shared a focus on enhancing learning and life opportunities for the student we also had specific concerns we wished to address. It was important to discuss and recognise how the QLC could help us to work towards our own and the team's needs.

As a team focused on working with a student with special needs it was essential to include family within the participants. I was not able to locate any literature that discussed the QLC being used in educational settings with any participants other than teachers. There were, however, a number of studies that explored the use of family as partners in participatory action research teams (Meyer et al., 1998; Santelli et al., 1998). The involvement of the paraprofessional and the student's mother in our QLC was essential to inclusive and democratic decision making.

The case study student was nine years old at the time of the study. If he had been older we would have invited him to participate within the QLC. This would have been a further adaptation to the QLC model.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the QLC, placing it within the learning communities literature. It has identified the key features of a QLC and discussed adaptations made to the QLC used within this study. The following chapter introduces the participants of the QLC in this project.

Chapter 4

The Context for our work as a QLC

This chapter introduces the participants of the Quality Learning Circle (QLC) formed within our school to help address issues of inclusion for Duncan, a student with ASD. Firstly, background details are provided for each of the participants. These are Duncan, his mother Polly, his teacher Lisa, his paraprofessional Sam, and myself, working within SENCO and researcher roles. The context within which we worked is discussed and a rationale for change is provided. This chapter concludes with a brief description of the curriculum chosen by the participants and justifies why a different programme was required to better meet Duncan's needs. This chapter introduces the people, the setting and the programme within my study, that is, the context for my study.

Introducing Duncan

The student who was the focus of my study chose Duncan as his nom de plume for this research. When we started this project Duncan was a nine-year-old boy who loved his playstation, computer, learning about space and his bike. He was formally diagnosed with ASD at the age of four years six months, although his mother Polly recognised at eighteen months there was something different about him. She states that at this time "he went from being a laid back kid to a tantruming, screaming toddler." She further states, "I had worked with a couple of autistic kids, aboriginal, in Australia and in my heart I knew - I recognised some symptoms." Duncan had always lived with his mother and two older siblings. He had some contact with his father, but this was sporadic. Duncan attended preschool and, when outside agencies were approached for help by the preschool to manage his biting behaviours, Polly asked one of the professionals if she thought Duncan was autistic. When the professional replied that she did, Polly did everything she could to get a diagnosis as she "thought it would get him help." **Duncan was excluded from preschool due to his behaviour and spent the rest of his final preschool year at home with Polly.** This was to be the first of a number of exclusions from education settings for Duncan.

Duncan's experience of schooling

Like most children in New Zealand, Duncan began his formal education at his first school at five years of age. After one year at this school his mother removed him. Her reasons were:

- The principal of this school did not support Duncan's diagnosis, deciding that his violent behaviour was the result of poor parenting;
- The principal was reluctant to work with Group Special Education so Duncan did not receive any funding at this time. Polly worked three days per week and she paid a friend to go to school with Duncan and support him during these three days;
- During his first year at school Duncan went missing on three occasions, one being when he climbed over a fence and entered the swimming pool area. On two occasions staff did not notice his absence for some considerable time.

After one year Polly decided that things were not going to improve for Duncan, that the school was, "hopeless, it failed Duncan" and he was enrolled at a school forty kilometres away.

Duncan's second school

At his second school Duncan received paraprofessional support for three days per week. The school allowed him to attend for these three days per week, although it is not clear if he was fully supported during this time. On the other two days he was at home with Polly. Towards the end of the school year Duncan was stood down from school for hitting a student. He had completed some maths work and the teacher asked everyone to clap in support of his efforts. Unfortunately, the children crowded around Duncan and he reacted by hitting a student.

Duncan's third school

Duncan then spent six weeks of the school year at home with Polly working on correspondence school material. It was during this time that Polly approached the school I was working in about working with Duncan to prepare him for starting school with us the following February. At the time of the study Duncan had attended our school for eighteen months. In 2005 Polly reflected, "His needs weren't met at

other schools – it wasn't until he came here that his needs were identified really… he's responded so well here, because there are limits and he might try and push them all the time, but they're here. I think that's really important."

Introducing the participants of the QLC

Each of the QLC's members chose their own nom de plume for this research. A brief profile of each member is presented to provide an understanding of the range of backgrounds, knowledge and skills brought to the QLC.

The parent: Polly

Polly had three children, the youngest being Duncan, the student who was the focus of the QLC's efforts. Duncan's two siblings were much older than him. One was living away from home. The other sibling remained at home with Polly and Duncan during this study. Polly had predominantly been the parent to whom Duncan related. She had brought Duncan up on her own since his infancy. She resided in a rural community approximately 40 kilometres from the school Duncan attended.

Polly demonstrated personal qualities of determination and selflessness in the choices that she made as Duncan's mother. Her commitment to giving Duncan the most support possible had meant that she had not worked for long periods in the paid workforce, however she did secure a fulltime job while this study was being undertaken. She had also made it a priority to enrol Duncan at a school which was not necessarily the closest, but one which she felt would meet his needs in the best way possible. Polly held great fears for Duncan's ability to survive socially at high school, stating "It scares the hell out of me." This was her motivation to join this project.

The paraprofessional: Sam

Sam was a paraprofessional who had worked in a variety of settings, supporting students with disabilities, for the previous nine years. Sam had a variety of diplomas and certificates in special education from a recognised education provider. She felt that her understanding and knowledge of autism were strengths that she could bring to the QLC.

Sam had previously worked overseas within a team setting to support children with special needs and had positive memories from that time. Although Sam had worked in the school for a number of years and she had, at times, worked with Duncan, she was not the paraprofessional with whom he usually worked. At the beginning of the study Sam had been supporting Duncan for approximately five weeks.

Although Sam had completed a variety of courses to support students with special needs she was constantly searching for new resources and strategies that could make teaching and learning more effective. Sam described her desires to trial new curriculum and resources, and to evaluate their effectiveness in change, as motivations for joining this project.

The teacher: Lisa

Lisa had trained as a teacher in another country, where she had taught for six years after completing a four-year degree. She had been teaching in New Zealand for one term when she joined the QLC. Lisa had taught one other student with disabilities in her career.

Although she had never worked in a team setting to meet an individual student's needs before, Lisa was positive about the challenge and impact of such a group on Duncan's education and learning. Duncan had physically attacked Lisa on two occasions prior to the project. On the first occasion Lisa had been instructing the class when Duncan walked over and punched her in the stomach without any warning. On the other occasion he ran up behind her in the playground and pushed her from behind as she talked to some students. Lisa wished to find solutions to cope with Duncan's unpredictable behaviour and resistance to working or interacting with some staff members. She described these concerns as her motivation to join the QLC.

My role as SENCO

Although Duncan enrolled at the school with some financial support from the Ministry of Education, this funding was for 15 hours of teacher aide support only. The principal felt it was essential for Duncan to have a well-planned transition and, as such, she requested my support in this role. Throughout the time that I worked with Duncan the principal made a decision to prioritise him as a student requiring my

support to cope at school (and for the school to cope with his varying needs). I became responsible for

- Supporting the principal, teacher and aides working with Duncan
- Designing and modelling resources to support his learning
- Leading his regular IEP meetings
- Organising the collection and analysing of data
- Reports to Group Special Education each term
- Identifying and modelling behaviour management and other strategies for when Duncan and staff could not cope
- Regular communication between home, school and professionals

As the school had no extra teaching hours to allocate to this position it was expected that these tasks would be carried out as part of the management unit the SENCO position attracted.

My relationship with the participants

Prior to this study I had worked with Duncan's mother, Polly, for eighteen months. Duncan's unpredictable behaviour had resulted in him gaining termly Severe Behaviour Initiative funding from the Ministry of Education. This funding was determined by an analysis of data on Duncan's behaviour every ten weeks. Therefore, regular contact was essential for us to monitor his needs and provide information for the funding applications. Further to this Polly and I regularly chatted on the telephone, or in passing at school. It would be usual for us to chat informally once or twice a week.

I had worked with Sam for the previous two years as she provided support in a number of school-initiated behavioural interventions. In my role as a SENCO Sam was one of a number of paraprofessionals who worked alongside me, and whose work it was my responsibility to monitor.

As Lisa was new to the school I had worked with her for one term prior to her joining this study. During this time a number of support staff had experienced deaths within their families. Instead of my being in Lisa's class to support her, I found myself assisting those students without aides in other classrooms. Due to these changes we

had to compromise and work in another way to support Duncan and Lisa. Thus, my involvement with Lisa was minimal prior to the study.

Duncan's progress at our school

Since his arrival two and a half years earlier Duncan had been able to demonstrate a significant amount of progress in literacy and numeracy. As a team we were proud of this academic progress, but Duncan's ongoing violent behaviour continued to be a concern. Behaviour logs reflected daily violent incidents, both within and outside of the classroom. Examples included punching and attempting to strangle peers and adults, spitting, and throwing rocks, books or school equipment at others.

Although Duncan received 15 hours per week Ministry of Education funding, within a term he was further supported by a paraprofessional that the school Board of Trustees funded. His unpredictable behaviour had made his presence at school a safety issue for staff and students. His paraprofessional used a number of strategies to support him during the school day. Examples are visual schedules, a "Take 5" card that Duncan could use to take a break if he thought he was getting angry, a timer and short bursts of teaching accompanied by a desired activity such as the use of a computer.

An IEP meeting was held six weeks prior to the commencement of the study. All participants (the study participants and a professional working in special education) agreed there was a need to identify specific behaviours and environmental factors that were hindering Duncan's ability to cope socially in his school and community. Sam and I carried out observations within a variety of school environments to help us identify more clearly how to support Duncan. Polly wrote observations from home in the home-school diary. I completed a functional analysis of behaviour from our observations and the professional with formal special education experience provided a peer review of my work. The summary from the functional assessment, in conjunction with information from home, provided the basis of identified needs for an intervention.

A critical friend

As I described in Chapter Two I made the decision to engage a critical friend. I was working within a variety of roles and recognised potential tensions between these roles. I believed a critical friend could support me as I worked within this project.

Duncan's identified needs

Following analysis of the data a number of issues were identified by me, and agreed to by the professional I worked with:

- Violent behaviour was occurring in response to misunderstanding the social behaviours of peers for example, Duncan perceiving peers are laughing at him rather than with him
- A lack of understanding when others break rules
- Poor play and social skills
- Duncan's inability to regulate his own behaviour when angry or becoming angry
- An inability to share (people, objects, turns in a game etc.)
- Resistance to working with some staff

Lisa, Sam and Polly agreed that, in their day-to-day lives with Duncan they perceived these to be real issues that were impeding Duncan's personal growth and ability to relate to others positively. These issues were also jeopardizing his attendance and inclusion at school. A number of environmental barriers were identified and this information was used to support the intervention.

The intervention programme

The intervention programme was delivered at school over a period of one school term (eleven school weeks). The team met in August 2005 to establish a timeframe, select resources and clarify roles. Although all team members were keen to work with Duncan, the team itself decided, at the first meeting, not to utilise Polly in this manner. Duncan refused to accept that his mother could work within the school. A daily timetable (see Appendix K) was planned using Lisa, Sam and me in teaching and observing roles with Duncan and his class. Polly offered to support the school programme with the completion of social skills activities as homework.

Choosing the programme

Prior to the study I spent three months researching programmes that had been designed to support best practice for students with ASD. Due to the sheer volume of resources available, I decided to investigate only resources that met the following criteria. The resources needed to meet an identified need in Duncan's learning (as defined through our observations, functional analysis of behaviour, IEP goals and discussion with participants). They had to have empirical evidence to support their effectiveness, and they had to be able to be used in our school without introducing extra staff and costs to implement them.

I selected ten resources. All ten resources met the criteria noted and the group took responsibility for selecting material from these resources for the programme. Participants each identified a particular resource they felt was ideal for Duncan to use.

The team chose the following resources to use during the intervention: *Mind Reading: Interactive Guide to Emotions* CD rom (University of Cambridge, 2003), *Exploring Feelings Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to Manage Anger* (Attwood, 2004), *Peer Play and the Autism Spectrum The Art of Guiding Children's Socialization and Imagination* (Wolfberg, 2003) and *Super Skills: A Social Skills Program for Children with Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Related Challenges* (Coucouvanis, 2005). These resources are detailed in Appendix L.

Summary

This chapter has introduced the learning community participants who worked within this study. The context within which we worked has been described along with a rationale for change. A brief description of individual programme resources was provided. Chapter Five investigates the structure and process of using the QLC within the study. It identifies successes and frustrations for the participants at different stages of their learning journey.

Chapter 5

The QLC: The Learning Journey

Within this study I present four findings chapters. This second findings chapter details stages in the learning journey of the Quality Learning Circle (QLC). It identifies strategies that supported the QLC and its members, and issues that needed to be addressed within the learning journey.

Stages in the learning journey

Tuckman (as cited in Morrison, 2002) identifies four stages of group development: forming, storming, norming and performing. Using Tuckman's framework of group formation I wish to examine more closely the different stages in the learning community's journey. Strategies that promoted the engagement of all the participants are presented and discussed in detail. Figure 4 presents a summary of the core features and those issues that the participants needed to address at each stage of the learning community process.

Figure 4: Issues to address at different stages of the learning community process

Stage	FORMING	STORMING	NORMING	PERFORMING
Focus	Limited focus on task achievement. Developing the relationships of the participants.	Limited focus on group achievement. Group has to agree on how it is going to make decisions and the structure it will work within.	Achieving group consensus through sharing information, providing feedback to one another and working towards the achievement of the task.	Achieving task. The use of energy and teamwork to achieve the task.
Issues	Introduce the idea that traditional roles within the group will be changing. How does the group make	What are the expectations of the study? What is the group focus? What meeting structure will we use? Have all	How do we promote the sharing of information? How do we provide opportunities to observe and work alongside each	How do we keep on task as the end of the year activities affect the school timetable? What are further challenges we

	time for participants to talk to one another?	members agreed to study participation requirements? What are the participant roles and tasks?	other? How do we share roles and responsibilities? Are we all taking ownership for decision-making? How are we supporting one another?	need to address? What are the learning outcomes for the student? What are the learning outcomes for the group?

Stage one: Forming

When a group is forming, its focus is one of developing the relationships of the participants, rather than demanding task achievement. The group has to determine how it is going to make decisions and act upon them. This phase is primarily focused on the group members developing a trust of each other.

Setting up the model: initial considerations

Before we could begin our work together there were a number of issues to consider. Management support, my own knowledge of the QLC and the traditional leader role I had worked within needed to be examined. I also recognized a potential tension between being the person most knowledgeable about the QLC model and yet still a participant within the QLC.

In the previous chapters I have detailed the steps taken to work alongside school management prior to, and at the beginning of, the study. Having gained the support of the Board of Trustees and school management I needed to consider how the QLC could work. I was guided by the literature on collaboration, learning communities and the QLC, which emphasized the need for sharing and for problem solving.

Expectations of historical roles needed to be questioned and reviewed, as power differentials were not part of the QLC model. Through informal discussion and participant interviews we considered the similarities and differences between team members, noting in particular the unique knowledge and strengths we brought to the group.

Leadership was a further consideration. I had already completed a number of tasks such as researching and locating resources and working alongside special education personnel to gain a peer review of my data analysis. I felt there was a danger that the other participants would identify me as the leader of the team. I introduced the idea that I would not be leading the group in this study. Although participants verbally accepted this information, the process of reiterating it, through words and actions, was an ongoing one during the study.

Issues for implementation

During this early stage of the QLC's learning journey, our most pressing concerns centred on time. I found the process of researching and locating suitable resources to be both time consuming and frustrating. Although this was not a challenge for the group, I found it challenging with the time constraints of being a parent, a student and a teacher.

The amount of time it took to gain ethical clearance for the project became a frustration for all the QLC participants. We understood the need for a system that had to consider ethical issues within the project. However, Duncan was a high risk for exclusion from the school and we were frustrated with the delays.

Stage two: Storming

At this stage of the process there is a need to

- Clarify expectations of the study
- Agree to a group focus
- Agree to a meeting structure
- Agree to a number of requirements for participation in the study for example interviews
- Clarify participant roles and tasks

The first meeting we attended prior to working with Duncan was critical in establishing and addressing these issues.

Structuring the group

The purpose of the first meeting was to establish and agree on the ways in which the group could work together. Discussion focused on group and individual needs, establishing a clear focus for us all, programme resources, the uncertainty of the process being trialled, developing safe environments to make mistakes, making opportunities for reflection and developing a flexible, but regular system of communication throughout the term. We established a timetable for staff working with Duncan. Further to this we drafted a timetable for meetings, interviews, work tasks and assessments for the group's participants.

Clarifying participants' expectations of the study

It was important to clarify both my expectations of the study and the expectations of those participating alongside me. Although I had a genuine concern for Duncan's inclusion at the school I was also interested in the process of working in partnership for Polly, Lisa, Sam and myself. At the first meeting we identified a team focus and I reiterated my extra focus of studying the process of partnership to all participants.

Agreeing to a group focus

At the first meeting I presented a summary of the data collected prior to the study to the group. We discussed the information presented and the participants agreed that

(a) Duncan required our support to be fully included in the school, and

(b) We needed to use resources that would help him understand the emotions and behaviours of others and teach him strategies for coping with his anger.

These goals were written on a sheet of paper and were used as a reference point for further discussion around resourcing and timetabling.

Agreeing to a meeting structure

We discussed and agreed upon the need for

- Regular scheduled meetings, setting possible dates which suited everyone, and that
- Participants would share leading meetings and I would work as a secretary, producing minutes and field notes from the meetings
- Meetings would start with a focus question determined by any participant who wished to raise an issue from their work within the study. In the week prior to

the meeting the person leading the meeting would approach participants to identify a focus question

- Feedback would be required from all members on issues raised by any participant including feedback for extension of successes, identified challenges, adaptations etc.
- Knowledge of changes to the teaching programme would be shared by all members within the meetings
- The group would determine its future focus
- Minutes would be circulated within two days of the meeting being held. All participants would be able to provide feedback and any issues raised would appear on the agenda for the next meeting

Agreeing to study requirements

Prior to the commencement of the study participants signed a consent form and agreed to a number of tasks. The consent form is discussed in chapter two and a copy is provided as Appendix F. The first meeting of the study gave us an opportunity to revisit these conditions of participating in the study.

Clarifying participant roles and tasks

The study required that we all share roles teaching and observing Duncan and each other. We needed to work within the confines of the established classroom timetable to locate times that would be the most beneficial to swap roles. For example, if the paraprofessional was in the classroom this would need to be at a time where the task required of her did not involve skills beyond the scope of her job. During this stage of negotiating roles it became clear that group members would rather be told what to do than to plan it themselves. Lisa said, "Just tell me what to do and I'll do it." We had to discuss the need for all of us to agree to tasks with no one person being responsible for allocating work to others.

Agreeing to the use of release time

Participants were required to decide how the school's gift of four days' release time would be used. We discussed the requirements of my research role and agreed to two day's release being used for interviewing and our initial meeting. Lisa wished to spend a day's release working with Sam and Duncan so that she could observe the

strategies Sam was utilising. As a group we all agreed to her request. The final day was put aside to use as needs arose during the study.

Successes and frustrations

All of the QLC participants entered the learning community with a belief that they could make a change for the better. This positive attitude made it easier to tackle issues such as organisation because members were prepared to be flexible in accommodating the needs of others. An example was the organising of Duncan's timetable. Lisa was prepared to make some changes in her class timetable so that both Sam and I could work within her room with minimal disruption to our own timetables.

A frustration for participants at this stage was the need to gather accurate data before commencing work with Duncan. All team members wished to get on with the job of teaching Duncan as soon as possible. As a teacher I felt frustrated at not being able to do so. As a researcher I regarded the need to gather information and ensure the framework for the study had been addressed appropriately as pivotal to the trustworthiness of the project.

Stage three: Norming

As the group works through issues it enters a phase of achieving consensus through sharing information for achieving, providing feedback to each other and working towards the achievement of tasks. As trust is developed within the group, members may feel more confident about taking risks. This stage is referred to as the norming stage of group development.

This stage of the journey was busy and, at times, felt chaotic. There were a number of successes and frustrations that occurred, some out of our control. Successes were the development of a positive teacher-student relationship, a growing sense of trust within the group, an evolving responsibility for our own professional development, an increase in communication and positive achievements within Duncan's programme. Illness, adhering to the timetable and cuts in funding were frustrations that affected the ability of the group to continue supporting Duncan's inclusion successfully.

Teacher-student relationship

The relationship between Lisa and Duncan began to change during this phase of our learning journey. At the beginning of the study when things went wrong Lisa was able to identify what Duncan had done, but was unable to identify what, or if, she could have done anything differently At this time Lisa was not able to confront her own professional practice. The sharing of roles during the study was critical in supporting Lisa's confidence to take more responsibility for Duncan. The chance to observe others and have others observing her on a regular basis provided her with the opportunity to work differently in her professional practice with Duncan and his peers. She began to question the impact of her actions on Duncan's ability to cope at school.

Growing a sense of trust

Prior to the study being undertaken we all coped with Duncan's behaviours in our own ways. Our interactions with him were often private, not public. Once we began observing each other our dilemmas, responses and behaviours became public to the other QLC members. We had to trust that others would not devalue our efforts. As we began to trust one another we were able to discuss, and agree upon, shared strategies we could all trial. We gained support from each other. We began asking each other for feedback in specific areas and it was easier to relax when things were not going well. The level of sharing, quality of feedback and depth of risk taking improved.

Problem solving together developed our confidence. Members began to see that an outside 'expert' was not required, that we could utilise each other's skills and knowledge to solve problems and were able to implement solutions within an acceptable timeframe before a crisis developed. We were becoming the active learners that Lovett and Gilmore (2003) discuss, finding resources within our school to support our learning. Thus, the study provided ongoing opportunities for the co-construction and practice of new knowledge amongst the participants within the natural settings of home and school.

Communication

Due to the amount of work we had to cover during the norming phase of our journey it was imperative that we communicated regularly with each other. This was supported through daily opportunities to observe and work alongside each other, discussing concerns as they arose. The sharing of knowledge in this practical and immediate manner enabled the participants to explore current methods of instruction and programme content continuously.

Achievements in Duncan's programme

Although all learning areas of the study were to be evaluated during the final phase of the project we were able to ascertain ongoing progress in Duncan's programme through the numerous observations and assessments undertaken. These successes provided us with a platform of confidence in our work and a belief that we were making a difference.

Illness

During the study Polly contracted a contagious illness and she was not allowed near the school. Duncan was not allowed to enter the school for a period of two weeks. I visited the family home and left work with Polly and Duncan at this time. During this phase we used a teleconference as a means for continuing our team meeting. Any other issues that arose between meeting times were addressed using the telephone.

Adhering to the timetable

The opportunity to observe and teach was a challenge, as the school often had changes to timetables at short notice. Visitors to the school, end of year concert practices, sports activities and staff absences made it difficult for us to adhere to our agreed routines. As much as possible we placed the study at the top of our priorities. There were times when we continued with Duncan's teaching, but had to change designated staff, as the person responsible for a specific task was not available.

Funding

As Duncan's behaviour changed, the Ministry of Education funding provided for him dropped to a level where, even with Board of Trustees assistance, we could not maintain the level of support to which he was accustomed. As a team we felt that we

were being punished for excellence. It became a challenge for us to identify ways we could work so that his needs could still be met and we could afford to support him.

Duncan is a student with ASD who does not fit ORRS criteria so all his funding has been under the Severe Behaviour Initiative. This means that his behaviour has to be of enough concern to warrant this short term funding option. In other words, to secure such funding his behaviour would have to revert to the levels that were observed at the beginning of the study. No funding criteria presented by the Ministry of Education addressed the unique challenges of students with ASD, unless they also met ORRS criteria. The lack of recognition of the needs of students with ASD in funding criteria became the biggest hurdle to Duncan's inclusion within a school setting.

Stage four: Performing

At this stage of the process the task was accomplished. The group could problem-solve and had strategies to cope with its own diversity and to identify challenges with performance or future needs. The QLC's focus was to develop a programme that met Duncan's particular learning needs. At this stage the group needed to assess whether those learning outcomes had been reached. A new consideration was the learning outcomes for the participants themselves. The final challenge the group had to address was that of deciding future ways of supporting Duncan's inclusion in the most practical and collaborative way possible.

Identifying learning outcomes for Duncan

As data had been kept before and during the study it was an easy task to assess Duncan on a wide range of skills. Equally important were the casual observations from other staff and community members about Duncan's improved social skills and behaviours. The teaching programmes all provided assessment guidelines and forms. The Time Out Log held within the school contained graphed data on physical violence and its frequency. Duncan was able to articulate some gains he perceived he had made and the participants' final interviews gave many examples of student progress they had observed.

Identifying learning outcomes for the participants

Although the focus of the final interviews was on the process of working within a QLC, all participants cited examples of learning outcomes and identified future learning needs for themselves. A summary of learning outcomes and future learning needs identified by participants is provided in Appendix M.

Identifying future directions for the group

As part of the study timetable I withdrew my participation within the QLC in late November 2005. The QLC had the opportunity to work for three weeks without my input. During this time the members had a chance to decide how, and in what form (if any), the QLC could continue to work. When interviewed at the conclusion of the study all participants felt confident in their ability to maintain a similar team for the following year.

Challenges for the group

Adhering to a timetable continued to be problematic as end of year activities disrupted the usual school routines. The need for clear boundaries and role definitions became even more important as the daily timetable routines were replaced with end of year activities.

A final challenge for us as a group was not to become complacent with our success. As we observed Duncan coping socially for longer periods of time it was easy to be happy with our achievements. Polly, however, continued to focus on the concerns and issues that she, as a parent, held for Duncan's future. She recognised that the social skills he required at high school would be very different from those he had acquired to date.

How did the participants make sense of working together?

Further to the discussions presented in this chapter the participants were asked to identify what they considered to be factors critical to the success of the partnership.

All participants agreed on the following points as being pivotal in what they considered was a working, collaborative relationship:

- Ownership was shared
- Clear boundaries were set
- Regular feedback to each other was essential
- Meeting dates were set and adhered to
- Regular communication occurred between all members
- All participants were knowledgeable about the programme being taught
- Student progress was observed
- Swapping roles enhanced the teamwork
- The input of all was valued

Lisa identified five extra benefits that working in a team had provided her with:

- Growth in her professional development
- Growth in her professional confidence
- A more positive relationship with Duncan
- A more positive relationship with Sam
- Benefits to all the other students in the class

Sam identified two extra points as important within the process:

- Investigating the possibility of extending the programme across the school, and that
- Role changes were essential to the success of the team

I identified four extra benefits that the QLC offered me:

- Growth in professional development
- Changing definitions of inclusion and professional development
- Experience of authentic partnership
- A practical model for future partnerships

Lisa, Sam and I identified the busyness of the school environment as a challenge to working within a team and maintaining clear lines of communication. Polly expressed

no such concern and was able to identify an extra three points that she considered enhanced her participation:

- Feedback from others in her local community
- The feeling of being totally included on the team
- Identifying and working towards new challenges for Duncan

Summary

The QLC model used within this study supported the investigation and practice of including Duncan within his school. It also provided QLC members with the opportunity to participate in an authentic partnership, which enhanced their understanding of Duncan's world and supported their own professional learning. The successes and frustrations of using this model were detailed within the stages of the group's learning journey. Chapter Six examines the development of partnership between the QLC members and identifies key factors participants identified as necessary to form and sustain an effective partnership.

Chapter 6

Partners in Learning: Sharing, Listening and Creating

In this second findings chapter I present data relating to the experiences of partnership for participants working in a QLC to support a student with ASD at our school. I investigate the definition of relationships and consider issues for parents in developing partnerships with schools supporting their children with disabilities. I discuss a number of principles the participants of the study considered to be essential for supporting the process of partnership. I have grouped these principles in to three themes: sharing, listening and creating. Strategies that supported the development of these themes are discussed. Although our focus within the QLC was to support a student to stay at school, all participants were able to identify key factors to sustaining an authentic partnership. In this chapter I wish to explore the link between authentic partnership and the development of new meanings and practices within the school. An analysis of the data gathering is undertaken and my interpretation is presented. I conclude with the identification of themes emerging from the data and a brief discussion of those barriers we experienced in our partnership roles.

Definition of relationship

Although the policies that frame special education in New Zealand use the term partnership to describe collaborative relationships with parents, families, professionals and schools, no one within the study used this term, though Lisa used the term "partners in learning". Analysis of the interview transcripts showed that the team members used the following words to describe the process of working together:

- team
- equal roles
- sharing
- a collaborative exercise
- a shared process
- equal part of a team
- equal par
- included

- progressive
- achievable
- supportive
- working together
- partners in this learning, and
- shared ownership

In my discussions with the study participants I am aware that I used the term "team" to define the group.

Discourses of partnership

Partnerships between families of children with disabilities and professionals are complex (Pinkus, 2005) and are influenced by practices associated with the continuing dominant discourse of professionalism (Elsworth, 2003; Hess, Molina & Kozleski 2006; Russell, 2004). This discourse situates the professional as the expert, a person possessing a knowledge particular to their profession, knowledge which non-professionals do not have easy access to (Murray, 2000). Hess et al. (2006) suggest that, although progress has been made, professionals still hold the power in partnerships by defining how and when parents are involved. Dale (1996) contends that opportunities for parents to enter such partnerships rely on professionals having, "a willing attitude and a commitment to partnership, work and power sharing" (p.27).

In contrast to the discourse of professionalism is a democratic discourse. Within this discourse shared decision-making and collaboration between parties is promoted (Elsworth, 2003). A democratic approach recognises that those people most affected by decisions being made are the ones who should participate in debating issues and the decision making (Fulcher, 1989). However, parents frequently find the processes of authentic negotiation and shared dialogue to be an ideal, rather than a reality (Elsworth, 2003; Morton & Gibson, 2003; Wills, 2006). This approach promotes a shift in power from the professional to parents of students with disabilities. Wills (1994) challenges this rhetoric by asking two questions. These are: "How can a partnership exist when inequality of information, financial and material resources are the basis of the relationship? Lifelong needs, wants and hopes drive one of the parties in this relationship. What is the rationale for the involvement of the other?" (p. 258).

Negotiating partnership

Negotiating equally between parties is pivotal to a democratic partnership (Dale, 1996). Dale suggests that negotiation is only possible if the professional within the partnership spends time listening to gain an understanding of the parents' needs, wishes, resources and expectations. Elsworth's (2003) study of partnership negotiation between parents of students with a disability and professionals supports Dale's findings.

The co-construction of partnerships

Partnerships are developed and co-constructed through building respect and trust among school and family members (Allen, 2007). Central to such partnerships is reciprocity, the mutual exchange of ideas and information between members. Reciprocity recognises all participants as making valid contributions to a partnership where inclusive decision-making is promoted.

Partnership and parents

All participants in the QLC in this study stated that they believed they were entering the partnership on an equal basis. However, the efforts that Duncan's mother, Polly, continually made in relation to his inclusion illustrate the extra stresses that parents face when working in partnership with schools to support their children with disabilities. Elsworth (2003) and Murray (2000) recognise a number of personal costs for such parents and lament the lack of acknowledgement of such stresses in their lives. Decisions that Polly had made included:

- Travelling to a school 40 kilometres from home daily
- Supporting Duncan at home during days when he was not able to attend school (at previous schools)
- Apologising to staff for Duncan's behaviour
- Maintaining regular communication with the school through the use of the home-school book as well as attending regular informal meetings at school to discuss progress
- Offering to work in the school to assist Duncan's inclusion
- Adapting home life so that the same routines occurred daily for Duncan, including ensuring specific foods were always available

- Not seeking fulltime work so that she could be available to drop off and pick up Duncan from school
- Bringing Duncan to school later in the morning if he had had a very unsettled night (and therefore was likely to have an unsettled day)

Polly made it clear to team members that she saw Duncan working and living with her for the rest of her life. She accepted responsibility for supporting him, stating, "I'll be there for him, for all my life."

Another stress for Polly was her constant worrying about future transitions, especially in light of previous transitions that had failed. A concern that she frequently expressed was of Duncan going to high school. She said, "Hell yeah. It terrifies me. The idea of …like cos he could just suffer so much emotional trauma, if he's targeted."

As a researcher I was aware that, although inviting Polly to join the study was critical to a parent–school collaboration study, I was also adding to the time commitment and pressures that she was under as a parent to Duncan.

Issues in decision making for the parent

Although Polly was keen to participate in the QLC she expressed the belief, at the beginning of the study, that her input would be restricted to supporting, but not challenging decisions made by the team. Although we had discussed the need for all of us to take part in the team as equals she did not appear, at this time, to understand or think that she would be making decisions about curriculum and programme changes. She said

> I'd just step back, because the way you deal with him at school has been a learning process for everybody. You've found different methods work, some things don't. You've had to try everything and I assume it will be an ongoing process like that. So I won't interfere. I wouldn't intervene.

Polly's comments illustrate a confidence in other team members to find solutions without her input. They also reflect a lack of shared decision-making and responsibility within her partnership role at this time.

Levels of decision making for schools and parents

When examining partnerships between schools and parents Ramsay et al. (1993) identified five levels of consultation that can occur. These levels are not linear. All levels continue to be important, even when other levels have been reached. They are

- Being informed – parents are informed about school and its programmes, but not asked for their views or opinions
- Taking part in activities - parental involvement is limited, for example, listening to speakers, respond to questionnaires
- Being involved through dialogue and exchange of views – parents are invited to examine goals and needs and discuss these with teachers
- Helping to make decisions – Parental views are invited when decisions that affect their children are being made. They help to decide on the content and emphasis of the programme
- Having responsibility to act – parents make decisions in partnership with the school. They are involved in both planning and evaluating school programmes

These guidelines support the consultation process that is essential for developing collaborative partnerships between schools and families within their communities.

Participants' perceptions and experiences of the partnership process

Prior to the study the participants were asked their views on how they thought the partnership could work. At the conclusion of the study they were asked to comment on their experience of how it had worked. The participants' comments illustrate changes for them in a number of areas during the study. They recognised an increase in consultation and shared decision making and an evolving transparency of school programmes and practices. They reported that working collaboratively offered more support than working as an individual and they reported a growth in individual and group knowledge throughout the study period. A further benefit was their developing knowledge of alternative ways of working.

The participants identified a number of strategies that supported these changes in their learning and promoted their participation within the partnership. They were able to offer examples of how these strategies supported them and the impact on their practice. For the purpose of this study I have grouped these strategies into three

themes: sharing, listening and creating. These themes are explored and examples used to illustrate their effectiveness in encouraging a democratic partnership between all the participants within the QLC.

Sharing

Sharing is a basic requirement of membership within a Quality Learning Circle (Stewart & Prebble, 1993). The participants within the QLC in this project all believed that sharing was critical to identifying our strengths and weaknesses. We were able to maximise each others' knowledge, skills and expertise through the sharing of dialogue, ownership, roles and resources.

Sharing dialogue

Allen (2007) argues that without genuine dialogue authentic partnership does not exist. Genuine dialogue takes place when all participants are willing to listen, to share and to understand each other's perspectives. Such dialogue builds trust within a partnership (Freire, 1970). Although conversation can be dialogue, not all dialogue is conversation (Allen, 2007).

We considered the ways in which we were communicating and whether our efforts enhanced ours or Duncan's learning. We recognised the regular IEP / funding meetings had served a purpose for gaining resources, but our implementation of the QLC model forced us to reconsider the purpose of us meeting formally. We agreed to work from questions within our practice and to concentrate on one issue per meeting. We made this decision because we hoped to find solutions to one problem at a time rather than becoming bogged down in having to solve everything at once. We also wished to work with a model of collaboration where both Duncan's and our learning needs could be addressed through such meetings. Traditionally our focus had only been on Duncan's learning deficits.

Creating opportunities for dialogue

Early in the study we made the choice to establish as many opportunities as possible for authentic dialogue. We recognised this as an important strategy to support us in our partnership. As well as considering new opportunities for communicating we

identified those important opportunities for dialogue that we had already established prior to the study. Dialogue opportunities included

- Informal chats with Polly when she was dropping off/ picking up Duncan
- Home-school book
- Telephone conversations
- The four scheduled meetings throughout the study
- Observations undertaken in playground, school, home
- Diaries and journals

We used the home-school book to share and celebrate success, to warn of possible problems and to alert others to new behaviours. The book reflects a relaxed conversation between people, rather like teacher Sophie Wilder's (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) observation that, when school staff and parents establish trust through dialogue, it is like "close neighbours chatting over the fence" (p.71). Informal discussions between school staff during the day established a similar feeling amongst the participants.

We took time to address issues around attending meetings for all the participants. Choosing meeting locations is an important consideration in breaking down traditional barriers to unequal partnership (Allen, 2007; Lueder, 2000; Ramsay et al.,1993). This is especially relevant to parents, who are often required to attend meetings at schools, rather than being offered a choice of location in which they may feel more comfortable (Pinkus, 2005). Polly expressed a wish for the meetings to take place at school. Due to the 40 kilometre trip from home to school she wished to have the meetings at a time when she would usually pick up Duncan. We made arrangements for Duncan within the school environment and considered the childcare responsibilities of all participants before agreeing on set meeting times and locations.

Sharing understandings

Shared understandings require both the precise use of language and regular conversation to make these understandings explicit (Collinson & Cook, 2007). Before we could investigate new ideas and practices we took time to construct shared understandings of our language. We made this choice because we recognised the QLC membership was diverse, with its participants engaging in a range of environments.

There was a need to demystify language and jargon that was used regularly within these different environments (Lueder, 2000; Ramsay et al., 1993). We recognised our memberships within different communities (for example families of children with ASD, teacher, education, parent, special education) and that each community would use language specific to its members. A further consideration was our recognition that language could be used to include and exclude others from conversations and decision making, thus promoting unequal power distribution within the partnership (Allen, 2007; Elsworth, 2003; Pinkus, 2005).

We agreed to seek clarification from each other at any time we did not understand the use of a term. We also agreed to explain our usage of everyday terms in plain English and to avoid the use of abbreviations which could exclude some participants from understanding the communication.

Sharing a common focus

We chose to articulate our focus at the beginning of the study and we constantly referred to it when making decisions throughout the project. We did this because we all wished to have some structure to our partnership, some idea of what we were aiming for, a reference point for our actions and decision-making. As a group we concentrated on working to keep Duncan at school, to make his curriculum relevant to his needs and to support his attempts at socialising with his peers. Throughout the partnership process this focus was reiterated through the topics participants chose to address at our meetings, comments and conversations in our instructor diary, home-school book and everyday interactions with each other.

Sharing ownership, sharing roles

Sharing power and responsibility is crucial to effective partnership (Timperley & Robinson, 2002*)*. As the participants worked together we began to take ownership, not just for Duncan's learning, but also for our own. This did not happen immediately, but became apparent as, over time, we made choices and reflected on those choices. Sharing roles within the school day was critical in developing such ownership.

Timetabling was an essential task in this process. We took the time to work as closely as possible to the established timetable and to provide opportunities to observe each other. Our focus was to ensure we all had enough energy to share observations, comments and questions regularly during the school day so that when we did hold formal meetings most issues would have been aired and participants would have had time to reflect on such issues. It was also critical to give and receive feedback through the home-school diary on a daily basis so that Polly had regular opportunities to comment and participate in decision making.

Sharing problems

We chose to accept mistakes as part of our learning journey. Sharing mistakes enabled all of us to learn more about including Duncan, and to reflect on our own practices.

As the partnership progressed a change occurred within our problem sharing and solving. At the beginning of the study we used the IEP and functional analysis of behaviour to determine problems we needed to address. At this time both Sam and I featured more predominantly in raising questions for all participants to discuss. As the study progressed all participants began to raise issues important to them in their relationship with Duncan. A review of meeting minutes, the home-school book and instructor diary comments, illustrates an increasing participation by all members in such communications.

Lisa attributed this change to a growing confidence in her own ability due to support from the other participants, "I've learnt from just asking, just asking, you know what do I do if he does this? Or what do I do when this situation comes up? And you know suggestions were given and I go, alright, I'll try that. And so I've done that.'' Polly did not recognise an increase in her questioning, seeing the experience as one of continuing a successful partnership with the school, "Yeah I've always just asked and everyone listens, Sam, Lisa and you."

Sharing learning

Sharing learning became a more effective way to work for Lisa, Sam and me. We reduced the duplication of resources, time and effort. The likelihood of a diminishing workload as we problem solved together was motivating to all of us.

Sharing success

Although the experience of success appeared to sustain our partnership and promote a confidence in our work, it was not something for which we planned. We simply found it exciting to be working together and to observe positive outcomes for Duncan. Our enthusiasm was not limited to Duncan's learning. We were able to give each other examples where children from Lisa's room had used new social skills taught within their programme.

Listening

Valuing the knowledge of all participants was critical to establishing and maintaining effective listening. The diversity of the group offered an element of new learning as people shared viewpoints that others may not have considered. As a participant in meetings, and also the minute secretary, I quickly became aware of who was speaking within meetings and who was not. At times I simply asked for the opinion of someone who hadn't been contributing on an issue so that we got to hear all opinions. The need to do this diminished as we began to work more closely together.

Listening: A parent's perspective

As a parent who had supported her son at four different education settings before he reached the age of seven years, Polly had experienced much talking with schools, but little listening. She said, "They just made up their minds that he didn't fit. It wasn't about him. It was about them."

Polly was supportive of the school, often expressing her gratefulness that Duncan was accepted by staff and peers. Paired with this gratefulness was a reluctance to criticise or pull apart school initiatives that had been supporting her son. The ongoing expectation from the other participants that Polly had a knowledgeable and valid contribution to make supported her as she began to determine and develop her role in listening and shared decision making.

During the study Polly raised a number of issues and made choices that resulted in changes to Duncan's programme. These included:

- The selection of cognitive behaviour therapy resources, which she deemed essential for meeting his needs. These became part of his programme
- Trialling and raising concerns about the adapted homework. This resulted in us changing homework back to some established activities that Duncan enjoyed
- Including Duncan in some local community activities and observing his ability to cope. On these occasions Polly provided feedback on social skills to us so that we could gauge Duncan's progress
- Identifying the need for Duncan to participate within the local community sports team and participating with others in the QLC to identify skills and resources needed to support this

The last example is an illustration of the power of effective communication in supporting families of students with disabilities and school staff to develop inclusive programmes together. Somebody listening, (in this case a number of people listening) to a family's concerns can result in meaningful and relevant solutions to an identified problem. As Duncan experienced success within the study's play programme the participants within the school staff began to look at further opportunities for expanding his skills at school. At one of our meetings Polly stated that she now wished to experiment with Duncan undertaking a sport within the community during the weekend. She said, "I want him to be part of the community – to have a go at cricket or t-ball in the weekends. I think we could all improve his programme further by teaching Duncan a specific game."

She identified a list of requirements for him to participate in the local community cricket competition, and through group discussion, we identified a number of strategies that could support Polly and Duncan to do this. Lisa offered to change her term plan for physical education and include a cricket skills unit for all students, "I think there are lots of students who would like to play cricket so we'll all have a go. We could teach all the kids." I offered to produce a visual resource to explain basic cricket terms, "The easiest way to introduce it to Duncan is with visuals. We know they work so I'm happy to take photos and learn a few basic terms. I'll make a book

of rules that the class can share and a copy for Duncan to have at home.*"* Polly responded, "He needs to know the terms being used, the positions of the players and the objective of the game. If he doesn't know that he will not play.*"* I agreed, "How about we also look at those issues he finds difficult now – how you take a turn, what happens when you go out. We could put a book in the classroom so all the kids understand this. It'll just be part of the class library.*"* Lisa took this idea further, "We can teach the game and work on the specific skills that go with learning how to play and learning how to cope with losing." Sam offered to encourage small groups of children to play cricket skills games when she was on duty. "Look it's no problem for me. I'm out and about the playground so much. We'll give it a go, just a couple of simple rules and see how we go.*"* Polly was enthusiastic, *"*Yeah. We'll read the book and we'll see who we can rope in to play at home. I'll take him in the weekends, even if I have to stay for hours."

Although school staff had identified opportunities within school none of us had considered Duncan participating within club level so quickly, but his mother's focus was clearly on achieving this goal. Thus, shared dialogue between all participants resulted in a questioning and challenging of the assumption that, for the present, we would only focus on play skills in school. It also resulted in further adaptations to both Duncan and his peers' sports programme. This enabled all the students to be able to participate in a regular cricket competition if they wished.

Conflict

Talking and listening involves a valuing of, and respect for, others and their point of view, even if it is very different from your own or it challenges basic assumptions within your thinking (Snell & Janney, 2003). At our first meeting we negotiated some rules around discussion, but all team members felt confident there would be no conflict.

Although throughout the study little conflict between participants did occur, I found myself, on occasion, experiencing an inner conflict in regards to my role. At times I remained silent rather than responding to other participants' views. At these times I felt that my established role as "an expert" would be reinforced by responding in a certain way, and my role as a participant would no longer be clearly defined.

Creating

Effective sharing and listening supported the development of an authentic partnership and the creation of new knowledge and practices. Over time QLC participants were responsible for creating

- More opportunities for learning for students
- Programmes/ resources to better meet student needs
- A partnership that encouraged risk taking
- New understandings of partnership and inclusion
- Stronger relationships amongst each other and with Duncan

Creating opportunities for learning

We began to see further possibilities for using Duncan's resources to meet the needs of others in the school. An example would be the use of the cognitive behaviour therapy programme. Although this appeared to be a very simple teaching resource its effect on Duncan was impressive. He volunteered information about his understanding of the world, which enabled us to comprehend why he chose to behave in certain ways.

We had another student with similar needs to Duncan within the school. We chose to trial this resource with him because our observations showed he was having difficulty in any social situation. We wished to support him to learn to cope in these situations. We were able to state our concerns and gain funding so the student could also work with this resource. We were beginning to create a wider selection of resources and educational approaches which could support us to meet the diverse needs of students who were currently not succeeding at school. In essence, we were beginning to develop a more inclusive approach to our teaching programmes.

Creating a more inclusive curriculum

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993) expresses principles of inclusion within a flexible framework. In theory it provides and promotes the adaptation of curriculum to individual need (Millar & Morton, 2007). In reality a number of QLC participants found, like Hulston (2000) that transferring this theory into practice was problematic. We noted a lack of exemplars to guide us in

adapting curriculum or identifying how our programme could be supported through the curriculum framework.

Although we identified play as an area where Duncan required support it felt groundbreaking to be including such work in an older student's curriculum. Lisa and I questioned whether we could justify utilising so much time each week on an integrated play group when Duncan and his peers would not be engaging in the (academic) curriculum. Polly and Sam had no such worries, stating clearly that "we know what Duncan's needs are and we should teach to them."

As a researcher I felt excited about trialling what could be a more inclusive curriculum for Duncan and the students in his class. As a teacher I felt concerned about wasting time and resources on something that may not work. My participation at this stage of the learning journey could be perceived as "on the edge of chaos". Although I did not believe the academic curriculum was meeting Duncan's needs it was a safe way of working and one I understood.

Creating new understandings of partnership

During the study we were able to examine our own beliefs around partnership. We began to identify and demonstrate changes in our ideas and practices around partnership.

An example is our agreement that all resources and programme content would be transparent to all participants. When anyone wished to make changes to programmes we ensured that all participants were aware of such changes, had a chance to reflect on their views about the changes and opportunities to problem solve issues arising from these views were created. We made the time to ensure that dialogue occurred. At the end of the study all participants were able to identify a knowledge of resources and programmes as a benefit of participating in this partnership. When Elsworth (2003) studied partnerships between teachers and parents of children with a disability a lack of transparency of programmes and resources was a major issue for parents. We recognised this issue and used transparency as a structure to promote a more effective partnership for ourselves.

Creating new understandings of inclusion

As we worked together and developed a trust between ourselves we were able to challenge both our own views on inclusion and those of the other participants. Polly supported this process, stating that, "anything we learn for Duncan has to help other students in the same boat." Sometimes changes in thinking and practice occurred without us being aware of the change. An example would be a changing focus from simply working on Duncan's programme to the participants examining class and school practices as barriers to learning for all students.

Another example is provided in Lisa's understanding of inclusion for Duncan. At the beginning of the study Lisa demonstrated little knowledge of Duncan's disability, "Does this child hate me? Why would they want to hurt someone? Because I know that Duncan must know what it's like that he's hurting somebody." At the conclusion of the study she was able to consider her own behaviour in presenting barriers to Duncan's inclusion, "I didn't really understand what autism is…you know I've got a loud voice and Duncan doesn't really respond to that loud voice. I know that. So when he comes in, I sort of go quiet, you know it's funny, I'm aware of it now."

Supporting partnerships

Resources were particularly important in facilitating our partnership to move towards shared decision-making and ownership. In some cases there was no change in resources, but a change in how we used them to support our work. The two resources that continually influenced our group's effectiveness were time and funding.

Time

All participants identified time as essential to sustaining an authentic partnership. They were able to identify critical incidents within the study where having time to process and discuss issues was a catalyst for change. Lisa identified the release day the school provided for her to observe and work with Sam and Duncan. Sam identified set meeting times which provided opportunities for regular communication as being important to her. Polly identified the time taken to write in the home-school book as the most effective communication tool. The delay between receiving the book after school and bringing it in the next morning allowed her time to reflect on

comments and provide feedback. I identified the time we took to plan well at the beginning of the project as being essential to the group's success.

Taking time

The day to day busyness of schools often makes it difficult to take time, to stop and observe what is happening, to observe our own behaviour, the culture of the school, student behaviour and to share with others in the observing role. Lisa reflected, "I'm working with Sam, and I'm doing this and that, but I'm also doing everything else in that classroom." We used any time given to us in a focused manner, appreciating the opportunity to plan with clarity.

During the study we made time to

- Locate resources to provide an inclusive programme for Duncan
- Read those resources and make shared decisions about their use
- Discuss new ideas and reflect on them continually
- Communicate daily, within a variety of contexts
- Provide opportunities for observing each other without disrupting the class timetable or being interrupted by others
- Set clear boundaries and expectations with a shared focus

Funding

For partnership to be successful all schools need to be adequately resourced (Ramsay et al.,1993). Lovett's (2003) and Allen's (2007) models of successful partnership relied on funding to upskill participants and to provide time to reflect and plan further action. The QLC provided opportunities for professional development in school, while developing an authentic partnership for the participants. Further consideration to this alternative delivery of professional development and the funding of such delivery may be warranted.

In chapter five I discussed cuts in Ministry of Education funding for staff to support Duncan's inclusion. As Duncan gained more control over his behaviour, funding was lost. A further consideration was ORRS funding and the use of this resource.

My role as SENCO was funded through ORRS allocations made to the school from the Ministry of Education. During this study I spent an increased amount of time with Duncan, rather than those ORRS students with whom I would normally work. Although I felt a tension between my role and the delivery of service to those particular students, school management did not share these concerns. The principal realised the potential of the QLC to develop collaborative skills for myself, Lisa and Sam. She deemed it an appropriate use of such funding to establish more effective models of partnership between home and school. She also saw this as a professional development opportunity for the participants, stating, "It's all about community, learning and working together. We need to learn together."

Other areas of funding to which we paid little attention were critical in supporting the partnership. An alternative curriculum required resources which were not expensive, but which were also not in schools. Although there was a wealth of resources available to support students with ASD, none of the three schools I worked in possessed recent resources. Therefore funding was required to source and purchase resources so that an alternative programme could be implemented. This issue is particularly pertinent for school staff and parents planning to meet the needs of students through the inclusive curriculum that policy documents promote.

Summary

For the participants in the study effective partnership was supported and developed through:

- Creating opportunities for authentic dialogue and reflection from such dialogue
- Establishing a trust of, and respect for, each other
- Valuing each other's knowledge
- Identification and use of clear structures and focus
- Identification of roles within the group
- Sharing of roles in observing and teaching
- Transparency of resources and programmes
- Shared decision making
- Shared ownership and responsibility
- Negotiation when decisions were not unanimous

- Shared problem solving
- Selecting resources and designing the programme for Duncan together
- Clarifying our values
- Shared dialogue between members and non-members of the QLC

Participants wished to reflect a democratic discourse within the partnership. Therefore, attention needed to be paid to historical barriers to participation for all members. Consideration was given to power differentials and the lack of negotiation inherent in the traditional professionalism discourse parents of children with disability experience in their interactions with schools. Practices enacted to address these barriers have been discussed within this chapter.

Time and funding were identified as further challenges to developing and maintaining authentic partnerships between schools and families with children with disabilities. In the following chapter I present a summary of findings identifying key conditions for authentic partnership and contrast the possibilities for authentic partnership within the IEP and QLC models.

Chapter 7

Participation or partnership?

In previous chapters I have described the use of a Quality Learning Circle (QLC) as a tool to facilitate an authentic partnership between school and home when planning to meet the needs of a student with ASD. Critical incidents throughout the study and the reflections of the participants were used to identify those practices that both challenged and supported the process of partnership for the QLC, and to interpret how participants made sense of working together.

Within this chapter I shall argue that while many present educational practices may promote participation, they do not enact authentic partnership between schools and families of children with disabilities. For authentic partnership to be realised a number of conditions must be met. Drawing on the experiences of the participants in the QLC in this study, and findings from recent research on partnership, this chapter will recommend that any education practice to promote authentic partnership between schools and families endorses such criteria.

Supporting democratic partnership between parents and professionals

When Pinkus (2005) studied effective partnerships between parents and professionals she found that, although the relationships were variable they all shared a common aspect: there was little understanding of how partnerships should strategically function within the special education context. Both parents and professionals appeared powerless in guiding the partnership to meet the children's needs. The parents in Pinkus' study identified four features which could support a democratic partnership between parents and professionals: consensus about the purpose of the partnership, clarity as to who is in the partnership and why, enabling equal power distribution between the partners, and implementing transparency and accountability mechanisms for monitoring the partnership. Participants within this study identified an extra consideration: authentic partnership requires adequate resourcing.

With consideration to these principles, I wish to examine the effectiveness of two models of partnership for schools and families working together to support the

inclusion of children with disabilities. They are the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the Quality Learning Circle (QLC). A typology of partnership between the IEP and QLC models is provided in Figure 5. The questions raised within this chart have emerged from the themes identified in previous chapters and research on partnerships (Murray, 2000; Pinkus 2003, 2005; Timperley & Robinson, 2002) and IEPs (Stroggilos & Xanthacou, 2006; Thomson, Bachor & Thomson, 2002). Consideration was also given to special education policies and documents (Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996, 2002a, 2002b, 2005a, 2007).

Figure 5: Typology of Partnership

	Traditional IEP as used prior to the study	QLC as used in this study
Membership	Family/whanau including student if possible, teacher, ORRS teacher, paraprofessional, GSE Lead worker, other specialists (Occupational Therapist/ Speech Language Therapist/ Physiotherapist/ Psychologist or others who may work with the student one or more times during the year).	Family/ whanau including student if possible, teacher, paraprofessional, ORRS teacher /SENCO. Although specialists could be involved in a QLC none were considered in this study because they worked with the student intermittently.
Timeframe	Approximately every 6 months	Formal meetings approximately every 4 weeks Daily communication
Reason for meeting	Funding applications, review progress, plan for future, produce a documented programme for an individual student	In response to questions raised from working with student, both for participants' learning and student's learning.
Who is the focus?	The student	The student and the QLC participants
How is the agenda negotiated?	Participants may arrive at IEP meeting with no set agenda. The previous IEP document may be used as an agenda, with participants discussing progress from set goals in that IEP.	Individual participants may raise any issue for discussion. The questions are raised one week prior to the meeting being held so that all participants have time to gather information in response to issues being raised.
Who leads the meeting?	Usually SENCO/ORRS teacher/ classroom teacher	All participants take turns to lead the meeting.

Who solves the problems?	Dependent on the person leading the team and writing up the IEP. Problems may not be solved at an IEP meeting.	Problem solving is the responsibility of all participants. Problems need to be addressed at the meeting and joint responsibility for decision making undertaken.
How are problems solved?	Issues raised may be discussed so that future goals are defined around them. Problem solving is dependent on person leading the IEP team.	All participants know what the agenda is and come to the meeting with knowledge derived from observations and working with the student. Participants can offer solutions and then work together to negotiate the agreed outcomes. Focus is on identifying possible solutions and adapting practice to trial such solutions. The responsibility for adapting practice is a join tone across participants.
How do the participants learn?	The focus is on the student learning. A team member may take responsibility for introducing new strategies and adaptations, but this teaching may take place in isolation from the other participants or with one or two other participants. Learning can be shared.	Participants learn over time, through discussion, observation, teaching and reflection on their own and others' practices. Learning may be enhanced by the use of theory or outside professionals/ critical friend. Such learning is shared.
What is the desired outcome of the meeting?	Teaching plan is written to outline roles and responsibilities in meeting the student's needs.	Participants' individual learning needs and the group's learning needs are identified and strategies for meeting them are defined. Student's learning needs are identified and strategies for meeting them are defined. All members views are heard and valued.
What happens next?	Teaching programme undertaken as agreed by IEP team. Review in six months.	Home and school programmes adapted as agreed per team. Daily communication between participants, Observations and co teaching undertaken using new strategies. Future agenda set by participants one week prior to next meeting in 4 weeks.

What is the purpose of the partnership?

The importance of developing and maintaining successful collaborative relationships within the inclusion process is recognised (Fraser, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2002a, 2002b; Thomson, Bachor & Thomson, 2002). The Draft Evidence-Based Guideline for Autism Spectrum Disorder (Ministries of Health and Education, 2006) suggests that teams need "a *dual focus* in delivering supports to students by directing attention to the student and also to the team itself. Student-centred efforts include:

- Developing the student's schedule or programme collaboratively
- Designing accommodations and adaptations together
- Finding ways to ensure consistency and quality among school staff
- Shared problem-solving about specific issues
- Co-teaching and co-working
- Planning for successful transitions within, between and beyond early childhood settings and schools

Team centred efforts include:

- Understanding other team members' roles and skills
- Clarifying the team's values
- Learning to communicate effectively among team members
- Identifying and resolving concerns
- Reaching consensus on decisions
- Developing trust and respect

(p.119)

In New Zealand the Individual Education Plan process (IEP) is the usual mode of supporting the democratic partnerships that educational policies promote. However, parents may feel that their participation within this process is not an equal one (Elsworth, 2003; Macartney, 2007; Moltzen, 2000).

Although the IEP has a focus on programmes for young persons and students with special education needs (Mitchell, 2000), it is possible that the same goals may be set year after year as students struggle to achieve set tasks. Although the IEP is viewed as a collaborative model of partnership (Fraser, 2000), its focus remains on the student, his or her needs and addressing those needs. As such it can be deficit based. An

unintended consequence might be, that through a deficit discourse, participants can get in the way of the inclusion they seek to support.

There has been criticism (Stroggilos & Xanthacou, 2006) that, due to the nature of the IEP itself, collaboration between parties is not realised. Attendance at an IEP meeting fulfils a requirement of participation, but falls well short of being identified as a working partnership.

A further challenge to the use of an IEP to promote partnership is the mixed messages in regards to its purpose by the Ministry of Education. The IEP is promoted as a collaborative activity focused on supporting the student. At the same time Ministry of Education (GSE) personnel advise schools of the need for an IEP in the months leading up to moderation (funding allocations) meetings. For schools and parents this can promote confusion about the purpose and use of an IEP.

Within this study the QLC was used as an alternative partnership vehicle to support a democratic discourse. It focussed both on the student's and the participants' needs. For the participants this meant that their practices could be identified as barriers to Duncan's learning. Rather than having a focus on the individual, inclusion was addressed as a community issue, and one that involved all community members. Further to this, regular reflection on desired goals or outcomes resulted in participants questioning the relevance of some previous decisions and resulted in a focus on addressing current needs to support the student, Duncan.

Who is in the partnership and why?

In Chapter Four I introduced the participants of the QLC, their roles in relation to Duncan, and their motivations for joining the partnership. All participants clarified their reasons for joining the partnership in relation to goals for themselves and for Duncan. Any confusion about purpose and roles was clarified at the beginning of the study.

When investigating parent/ professional relationships, Pinkus (2005) suggests the numbers and roles of partners need to be more carefully defined and possibly reduced. Within the usual IEP meeting there can be a range of professionals present, some who

may have met the child once, or not at all. In my experience there are often professionals present who have worked with the child on only one or two occasions in the six months since the last IEP. The attendance of team members under these circumstances cannot be deemed as partnership. The Ministry of Education (2007) advises that the number of professionals at an IEP meeting should be kept to a minimum, but it remains silent on what type of input and contact professionals should have with a student and his family before they can be considered authentic partners within a team.

The recent practice of Group Special Education allocating a lead worker to attend IEP meetings could help reduce an overload of professionals attending such meetings, but the quality of input from the lead worker would be dependent on their actual participation in the student's programme and their understanding of the student's, their family's and the school's needs. The role of the lead worker and their understanding of partnership practices are further areas for investigation.

As a parent of a child with disabilities, Macartney (2007), stresses the importance of team members taking the time to get to know her daughter, "through deep engagement in and learning about her world." In previous chapters I have detailed those strategies that the QLC members used to ensure they could get to know Duncan, to engage with him and to learn about his world. Participants reflected that the knowledge gained through their efforts gave them the confidence to be able to contribute to future planning. This resulted in an authentic knowledge of Duncan and a growing understanding of the issues the QLC needed to address in the participants' practice.

Parents and paraprofessionals are often the most knowledgeable about a student (Murray, 2000). Teachers have variable knowledge depending on the context in which they enact inclusive practice. Within this study Duncan's teacher, Lisa, was able to reflect that, even after attending an IEP, she relied on the paraprofessional to look after Duncan. After working within the QLC where she had to engage with Duncan, co-teach and observe others doing so, she stated, "I have a wealth of information. I just don't worry. He's just one of the kids." The IEP offered her the opportunity to participate in planning a programme. The QLC offered her the opportunity to work

with Duncan and the other participants, to develop and create new understandings and knowledge about including children in her school.

Participants within this study were able to identify times when support from professionals outside of the QLC was important. Participants found the use of special education personnel in response to their identified learning needs, rather than as a six monthly appearance at a planning meeting, was a more valid use of this resource. As a participant and a researcher, I often engaged in dialogue with a critical friend so that I could discuss ideas with him and clarify my thoughts. His inclusion on the QLC was not warranted, but his encouragement needs to be recognised as a support for my participation within the QLC.

An equally important consideration in establishing authentic partnership is the absence of team members from meetings. Elsworth's (2003) opinion that disempowered parents do not share their difficulties in public is supported by Macartney's (2007) explanation that, due to feelings of disempowerment, frustration and marginalisation she couldn't face attending her daughter's IEP. She sent her husband to the IEP meetings. "I didn't see any point in attending if I wasn't going to be heard and I didn't like the way they planned around subject areas of the curriculum rather than Maggie as a learner and part of a learning community."

The QLC membership within this study was drawn from those people working and living with the student on a regular (at least weekly) basis. At the end of the study Lisa reflected on the team membership saying, "It was so easy with just four people. Easy to catch up and get things done. It could have been harder if we had lots of people, but no, it was easy." Polly expressed a similar view. "Everyone knows Duncan, they know how hard it can be. I felt like I was the same as everyone else."

The QLC's dual focus on student and team needs required more time commitment than the traditional IEP team. Members had to be committed to working together regularly. Present Ministry of Education and Health practices of sporadic professional support to teams supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular schools are clearly at odds with this collaborative model of working.

The inclusion of students within those teams that develop plans for their learning is a recent development in inclusive practices. It is recommended that, if possible, students participate in IEP teams (Ministry of Education, 2007). Participants saw Duncan's inclusion on the QLC as a natural progression as he entered adolescence.

How do we enable equal, yet shifting, power relations?

Power differentials need to be recognised before any authentic parent-professional partnership can begin (Allen, 2007; Elsworth, 2003; Lueder, 2000). In the previous chapters I have detailed efforts made by participants within the QLC to identify practices that could benefit all members, rather than serve the purpose of establishing a group hierarchy. These efforts reflect an emphasis on identifying barriers to partnership through communication (How did we do this? Who did the communicating? Whose point of view matters? How was the agenda negotiated? Where did we communicate?), sharing information (transparency of information across all participants, lack of jargon in communication, focus of information) and the negotiation of shared decisions (How was the problem identified and solved? Who contributed to a solution?). In Chapter Six participants in the study reflected that, in their QLC experience, effective partnership was supported and developed through

- Creating opportunities for authentic dialogue and reflection from such dialogue
- Establishing a trust of, and respect for, each other
- Valuing each other's knowledge
- Identification and use of clear structures and focus
- Identification of roles within the group
- Sharing of roles in observing and teaching
- Transparency of resources and programmes
- Shared decision making
- Shared ownership and responsibility
- Negotiation when decisions were not unanimous
- Shared problem solving
- Selecting resources and designing the programme for Duncan together
- Clarifying participants' values
- Shared dialogue between members and non-members of the QLC

In Chapters Six and Seven participants within this study reflected on the importance of establishing a clear focus early in the partnership process. This enabled all participants to discuss and develop shared understandings of the focus and to concentrate their efforts on clearly defined knowledge and communications. Sam summed this process up, "We all knew where we were going and what we had to do. We had the chance to listen to each other, to think about what was working and what wasn't. That feedback was so important. We could plan for the next step together. We just thought about the things that we needed to know, and that Duncan needed to know."

Like Tett (2005), participants found that as they developed knowledge of one another, friendship evolved and trust was established. Trust enabled shared dialogue, planning and the participation of all partners in new working methods. It became the basis of a collaborative effort. This change was not accomplished quickly, but developed over daily interactions and communications. As I observed in my journal, "it's the small things that matter, that make the difference."

IEP teams with limited time frames are immediately challenged by a lack of time together. Shared problem solving, co-teaching and co-working, and planning for successful transitions between and beyond education settings requires people to meet often and communicate regularly with each other. Yet IEP members may meet only twice a year. Professionals may come into a school and work with a student with no other team member having the opportunity to observe and work alongside them. Parental concern about the lack of valuing of their knowledge and input into their own children's programmes are reinforced by such practice. How then, is it possible for such teams to discuss and reflect on any shared decision making, practices or responsibility?

Are procedures transparent and accountable?

Pinkus (2005) identifies parental frustrations associated with the lack of transparency in special education procedures. She suggests these are emphasized by the positioning of professionals in conflicting roles as "partner" and "gatekeeper". There is doubt that professionals working within these supposedly incompatible roles can support a democratic partnership (Murray, 2000; Wills, 1994). Through their experiences at

previous IEP meetings participants within this study regarded the local non-school professional as fulfilling both of these roles. A further area for study could be the inclusion of such personnel in alternative partnership models.

A further concern Pinkus shares is the lack of accountability for meeting the child's needs and the objectives of the partnership. Parents within her study wanted clearer time frames, clearly defined roles and reporting mechanisms in place so that decisions made at IEP meetings would be followed up and funding accessed or adaptations to programmes made. Although a teaching plan, which notes adaptations and methods, should be produced following an IEP meeting, Elsworth (2003) argues that schools often revert to traditional practice within weeks of such meetings taking place. As the IEP is usually not revisited by the team for up to six months it is possible that no change to a student's programme may occur.

In contrast, the QLC participants in this study met often, and worked daily, to an agreed focus on Duncan's programme. As meetings were focussed on participants' and Duncan's needs a wide range of information was presented to all participants. When a crisis occurred it was quickly dealt with by the participants. Like Tett (2005), the participants were able to identify the effect of success on their confidence, their skills and their knowledge of Duncan. They also recognised a developing ability to reflect on their own practice. This resulted in small changes that were shared amongst the team, further building coherence, trust and empathy with each other.

How is the partnership supported?

In Chapter One I argued that partnership does not take place in a vacuum. Within this study it was enacted within both the micro settings of the school and home, and the macro settings of special education and education policies and legislation. Two particular aspects of support which the participants identified as crucial to the partnership's success were funding and time.

Within the school and home the partnership was supported by the participants, who had a positive attitude and commitment to learning and developing a democratic partnership. Previous chapters have detailed the resourcing commitments made by the school principal and Board of Trustees in support of the partnership. This included a

recognition of the study as a professional development opportunity for all participants. During the study the principal reiterated that, "It's all about learning. Duncan has a right to be included in his school. It's our responsibility to support him and to learn how to do that better."

In Chapters Four and Five I discussed the difficulties the partnership faced in including Duncan, a student with ASD. The current Ministry of Education funding criteria ignores the needs of many students with ASD, and our definitions of including Duncan were clearly at odds with a funding system that ignored our knowledge and current research. The Draft Evidence-Based Guidelines for Autism Spectrum Disorder (Ministries of Health and Education, 2006) are currently undergoing a consultative process and their adoption could remedy this funding dilemma.

A further issue that was discovered in this study was an extra barrier presented by funding criteria for the inclusion of students with disabilities. The Behaviour Support Funding Initiative had strict guidelines around the funding of a paraprofessional to support Duncan. There appeared to be no recognition of the value and purpose of a partnership in addressing these needs. Therefore, no funding would be available to support the development of a partnership focused on helping a student at high risk of being excluded. Such recognition would allow teams like the QLC in this study adequate resourcing and time to address issues such as challenging behaviours, and to take joint responsibility for a way forward.

Learning and partnership take time. Reflecting on participants' experiences, and changes in their practices over the course of this project, time can be seen to play two crucial roles in the partnership process. Partnership requires patience and persistence over a period of time if long-term goals are to be achieved (Tett, 2005). We needed time to gel as a team, to explore ideas and understand each other's knowledge. We needed time to build trust and empathy, to develop confidence and to reflect on our own practice. With time came the confidence to challenge our own knowledge and create new ways of thinking and acting.

Finding time to work together was also a challenge. The study took place within the busyness of a school with competing needs from other students, families, curriculum

and staff. Previous chapters have detailed our attempts to make time for each other. This study demonstrates that developing democratic structures, which enable all voices to be heard, demands time. If partnership rhetoric is to match reality, adequate resourcing of time for such ventures is essential.

Pinkus (2003) argues that partnerships need to work within budget constraints. The QLC model clearly demands more funding, both in time and money, than the accepted IEP practice most educational settings currently use to enact partnership between parents and themselves. This study has demonstrated that, it is the way resources are utilised that has the biggest effect on partnership. For fundholders the pressing question has to be one of priorities. Is our inclusion of students with disabilities within regular schools going to be a process of participation or partnership?

What did the participants think?

All participants had taken part in IEP meetings within a range of schools and we had all participated in one IEP meeting for the student prior to undertaking the study. The participants worked within a QLC for one school term during the study. At the conclusion of the study the participants made the decision to continue with the QLC as their preferred mode of working together. The dual focus of this model appealed as participants were able to state better outcomes for the student and for themselves through their participation within the QLC. Participants clearly identified the sharing of problems and decision making as crucial to the success of the partnership. As Sam said, "We're all in this together. It's about Duncan and it's about us."

Summary

Within this chapter I have discussed a set of criteria for establishing authentic partnership between professionals and families of children with disabilities. I have been able to support the use of such criteria, drawing on the experiences of the participants within this project and recent research into such partnerships. A typology of partnership models has been presented to contrast the effectiveness of the QLC and IEP models in meeting partnership criteria. In my final chapter I wish to examine the lessons learned from this study that I and other teachers may use in future teaching and partnership practice.

Chapter 8

It's the small things that count

"Creating the conditions for a collaborative home-school environment begins with recognition that parent-professional co-operation is something that extends beyond legislation and that interpersonal, not legislative, conditions are the bases for meaningful parent and family involvement."

(Simpson, de Boer-Ott & Smith-Myles, 2003, p.128)

Like Simpson et al. (2003) the participants of the QLC in this study found that interpersonal skills such as sharing, listening and negotiating provided a base for supporting an authentic partnership. Findings of this study indicate that it was the many small steps that made the difference in supporting the partnership. For example we used the phone, school pick up and drop off times, the home-school book and informal chats as well as meetings to ensure everyone knew what was happening. We paid attention to issues such as arranging meeting times that did not require people to find extra childcare.

It was not the rhetoric of policies and education documents that guided the partnership, but a daily commitment to supporting an 'at risk' student to stay at school. Participants demonstrated a flexibility and commitment to an unknown learning journey in the belief that they could make a difference in Duncan's life. They negotiated ways of working together that respected both home and school cultures and focused on the changes needed to enhance Duncan's inclusion.

An important aspect of this partnership was the recognition of historical positions of power for participants, and a valuing of the knowledge of all participants. The QLC model does not promote a group hierarchy and we benefited from the unique knowledge that all participants had of Duncan. It was simply easier to plan and support inclusion with such a depth of knowledge within the group.

How did the participants make sense of working together? What did they identify as processes or strategies that facilitate or hinder the partnership process?

Consideration to both these questions has yielded many similar answers. When identifying strategies that supported the partnership, participants found they were also describing how they made sense of working together.

All participants agreed on the following points as being pivotal in what they considered was a working, collaborative relationship:

- Ownership was shared
- Clear boundaries were set
- Regular feedback to each other was essential
- Meeting dates were set and adhered to
- Regular communication occurred between all members
- All participants were knowledgeable about the programme being taught
- Student progress was observed
- Swapping roles enhanced the teamwork
- The input of all was valued
- Negotiation when decisions were not unanimous
- Sharing provided the participants with the confidence to work in new ways
- New resources and programmes were not restricted to the student supported in the study, but were used with a wide range of students
- Use of non QLC participants to engage in critical dialogue

Partnership did not simply happen. It required time to be established and to develop. Like Fullan (1999), we learned that there are no shortcuts and that it takes time and patience to stay focussed and to work collaboratively.

Within this study resourcing was identified as a challenge in a number of ways. Funding and time were critical in supporting the partnership. We could have been supported further by the provision of guidelines for setting up and maintaining effective partnerships. Ministry of Education documents continue to ignore the value of such support.

We were able to use the basic principles of the QLC and some lessons learned from previous research to guide us, but essentially we developed our own partnership model to suit our needs. It is hoped that our descriptions of how we worked together may help others in a similar position, but the lessons we have learned are ours and peculiar to the context in which we worked.

Policies and practices that support partnership

Partnership does not work in isolation and participants found the partnership process was enhanced by the supportive practices of school management during this study. A further gap this study has identified is the lack of recognition in funding criteria for the difference an effective partnership can make in supporting the inclusion of students with severe behavioural challenges. The group was so successful in this study that Duncan lost his funding. Funding criteria currently focuses on the individual, not those supporting him/her. Consideration needs to be given to the costs and issues of ineffective partnerships with a particular focus on current Ministry of Education practices.

The effectiveness of the QLC

A further consideration for me was the effectiveness of the QLC as a model for promoting learning partnerships between school and home.

What did the QLC achieve?

The QLC achieved a number of group and individual goals. It offered us a working model of professional development, which also supported authentic partnership between all members. It resulted in a programme that helped Duncan understand some of the social behaviours of his peers.

Although the QLC model was used in this study as a partnership tool, the participants were able to reflect on its impact within their own professional development. It became a working model for our professional development because it was directed by us, with a focus on our needs. As Lisa stated, “It’s happening (because) I’m not being given the theory. – I’m being given the theory, and it’s in practice, so I’m watching it.”

Following the implementation of the study all QLC participants were able to identify learning outcomes for themselves. They were all able to identify a learning outcome from working within the team and a future learning need that could be addressed within a new QLC. The QLC provided a community, which fostered learning partnerships between all the members.

How appropriate was the QLC for my purpose?

I wished to find a learning community model that could support a democratic process of including a student with special needs in our school. It needed to endorse and promote the knowledge of all participants. Better student outcomes had to result from the use of the community. In these ways the QLC exceeded my expectations. I had observed that many of the "partnerships" I was working within were unbalanced and undemocratic. The QLC is the first partnership I have worked in where I felt, and the other members stated clearly, that everyone was responsible for the outcomes of the team.

The success of the QLC required a number of changes to the traditional manner in which we worked. It required team members to meet more frequently than the usual IEP timeframes. Regular communication was important. The group maintained a focus on set tasks and issues. The QLC required more effort than traditional IEP teams and partnerships. It could require more funding, especially if management was to recognise the value of attending meetings, which could be in school, rather than out of school time.

Future practice: There's no going back

There are many ways of working in partnership. The QLC discussed in this study is one of them. I have considered the usual mode of partnership I have worked within – the IEP- and I realize that I no longer consider it to be a model that promotes or supports partnership as I have experienced it through the QLC. I have learned that to develop knowledge of a child with disabilities I need to be working regularly with that child, with the child's families, aides and teachers. If I wish my knowledge of the child to be valued I have to know the child. Observing them a week before the IEP is not enough. I have experienced the growing confidence of a group of people sharing responsibility for learning, for developing new knowledge and for taking risks, albeit

managed risks, to support the inclusion of a student with ASD. The extra effort was worth it.

I found the dual focus of the QLC a more effective way of working as I was constantly aware of both Duncan's and the participants (including myself) learning needs. As we worked together our focus shifted from an individual (Duncan) to the class and school, examining our own practices, finding solutions together with no one person responsible for decision making.

This study has given me the opportunity to experience the difference that authentic partnership makes. I have worked in teams with little thought to how my actions have unintentionally supported exclusive practices and marginalised the views of others. The QLC experience has taught me to listen, to be patient and to build relationships to solve problems. This is not to say it has provided me with answers. Although for me there is no going back to the superficial partnership practices of old, the challenge is how to move forward.

I now recognise a number of dilemmas as I attempt to transform newly acquired knowledge into practice. I recognise tensions within my roles as professional and supporter of families of the children with whom I work. I also understand there are other professionals who have worked with me in roles that I now identify as exclusionary. They still expect me to work in ways I can no longer perform. How can I work in such teams in the future in a way that can support the principles I now recognise as being critical to any form of partnership? What actions can I take to clarify my participation in such teams? I am currently in the position of trying to decide how I will act in future meetings where I believe there is a potential for partnership, but where some participants are marginalised to serve the goals of others.

Limitations of this study

This study was limited to a group of four participants; a teacher, paraprofessional, parent and SENCO/ researcher working together between one school and home. The study was limited to participants working and living with a student with disabilities within a primary school setting. Diverse populations and settings could result in the

identification of other issues, for example, the inclusion of a parent with disabilities within the QLC, working with a child with disabilities in the early childhood setting.

The participants in this study had a genuine concern for the student and a positive attitude towards the use of a QLC as a partnership process. As such there was a flexibility towards making changes and taking risks that may not be apparent in less accommodating teams. A team which had a more challenging history of interaction could add a different perspective in future study.

Consideration needs to be given to my roles as a SENCO / participant and researcher. Throughout the study I have attempted to disclose tensions I have experienced within these roles. I have also attempted to use my knowledge within these roles to provide an insider perspective in my work. This has caused some tension in my writing of the project. I am aware that, at times, I have described the participants as "they" while at other times I have used "we" depending on my researcher or participant view. During the study these roles merged many times.

This research is my interpretation of the experiences of the process of partnership for myself and the other participants. Their retellings may provide further perspectives. I have attempted to record their experiences as accurately as possible, ensuring many opportunities for their feedback on my interpretations.

As the study developed I became more aware of the impact of my interviewing skills and questions on the information the interviews procured. Reading the transcripts, I realised that at times, I had missed opportunities to follow up comments through my focus on a following question. In retrospect, I could have interviewed the principal and out of school professional, both prior to and at the conclusion of the study. Although I did record some comments from the principal, this was in a discussion rather than the interviews other participants undertook. My research has demonstrated the impact that management in schools and other professionals contribute to partnership, and these voices could have added a further dimension to the study.

As a participatory action research project the focus has been one of enhancing practice rather than providing answers. My study has detailed the use of one

alternative partnership process, the QLC and its impact on learning and practice for the participants. Other alternative modes of partnership between parents and professionals have not been investigated within this study.

Implications of this research

This study indicates that authentic partnership between families of students with disabilities and professionals can be achieved. It also indicates that ineffective partnerships can result in inferior practices of inclusion, a devaluing or ignoring of the knowledge that team members can contribute and a waste of some resources put in place for students with disabilities. We, the participants, made a difference by using an alternative partnership model, by paying attention to barriers for each other to work together and by reducing those barriers. We were prepared to take risks and to support each other. We learned. Duncan learned. Duncan's peers learned. We addressed the issues that were important to us as people who cared about Duncan. We also recognised that Polly, Duncan's mother, was making yet another commitment to support Duncan's inclusion with his peers. She was driven by a desire to make a difference for him. Unlike the rest of the participants her commitment was unpaid and unrecognised in any funding criteria.

At the conclusion of the study participants chose to continue working within the QLC partnership model, rather than returning to their historical ways of working. Participants recognised that collaboration reduced their workload at school and reduced the stress of sole responsibility for decision-making. This is especially important when working with students with severe behaviour challenges who may behave unpredictably.

As well as having benefits for us as we examined our own practices this study can offer a starting point for those professionals and families wishing to investigate ways of working together to support inclusion of their children with disabilities. It may offer insights on partnership, and the issues and challenges of setting up an authentic partnership between families and professionals. It may be a starting point for those policy makers who recognise the importance of providing guidelines for other professionals and families working in partnership.

For us, this study has taught us how empowering an authentic partnership can be. The essence of the partnership is summed up by Sam, “We’ve kept the open communication, and we’ve said if there’s a problem, or what’s working well and we’ve moved with it. We’ve actually moved with Duncan. It’s been about Duncan and it’s been about us.”

Glossary

These definitions (except where otherwise noted) are taken from the Ministry of Education website (www. minedu.govt.nz).

Autism Spectrum Disorder: A pervasive developmental disorder. The American Psychiatric Association (1994) has produced a criteria for diagnosis of ASD identifying qualitative impairment in social interaction, communication and restricted repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests and activities as characteristics present in this condition. Although individuals with ASD share these commonalities they vary from one another in the manifestation of the core characteristics (Indiana Resource Center for Autism, 1997).

Curriculum: A school curriculum is each school's programme of teaching and learning. The national curriculum for all New Zealand schools.

Educational Setting: Where the student is learning.

Inclusion: Inclusion in education is about valuing all students and staff. It involves supporting all children and young people to participate in the cultures, curricula and communities of their local school. Barriers to learning and participation for all children, irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, disability or any other factor, are actively reduced, so that children feel a sense of belonging and community in their educational context.

IEP: The Individual Education Programme (also known as Individual Education Plan) is a programme developed for school students with special education needs. It outlines the student's goals and the time in which those goals should be achieved. The programme also includes the resources, monitoring and support, and the evaluation required to enable the student to meet those goals over the defined period. Ideally, the IEP is reviewed at least twice a year.

New Zealand Curriculum Framework: The document which sets out the policy direction for the New Zealand curriculum.

Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS): The schemes are a resource for a small group of children (about one percent of the school population). These children have severe difficulties and therefore the highest need for special education. The resource funds:
a) specialists to provide advice and programmes to meet a student's special needs,
b) additional teaching time,
c) teacher aide time when children need support with personal care and/or to engage in the curriculum
d) a small grant for consumable items, such as audio tapes, disposable gloves.

Professional: Refers to relationships within a disabled child's life which involve payment by an education authority (Murray, 2000).

Severe Behaviour Difficulties: Students whose behaviour jeopardises their own physical safety or that of others and severely limits the student's access to the school curriculum.

Severe Behaviour Initiative: Advice and support for students with severe behaviour difficulties, their schools and families.

Special Education Group (GSE): On February 28 2002, staff from the former Specialist Education Services (SES) and the Ministry of Education's special education area combined to form a new group in the Ministry focused on providing services to children and young people with special education needs, and their families and whānau, schools, and early childhood education centres.

SENCO: Special Education Needs Coordinator. This position is available in some schools. Within this study this role involved being responsible for planning, budgeting, modelling to staff and working in partnership with school staff, professionals and families/whanau to support students with disabilities within the school.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Legislation, policies and significant actions chart

Legislation, Policies and Significant Actions which have shaped special education in Aotearoa New Zealand:1986 - 2006

1988	Policy Statement released defining mainstreaming	Definition still used today although it is renamed as inclusion.
	Curry Report published	Review of autism services commissioned by government
1989	Education Act	Children with disabilities have right to enrol and receive education at state schools. Ministry of Education established.
	Tomorrow's Schools introduced	Self management of state schools introduced. Change from welfare state model to Individual responsibility.
	Special Education Service set up.	New state agency set up to provide services to pupils with special education needs and their families. Contracted to the Ministry of Education.
1991	Statement of Intent published.	Changes to funding and resourcing and disestablishment of units and specialist teachers as positions became vacant.
	Towards Inclusion Teacher Professional development	Professional development offered to schools with the focus of inclusion of students with special education needs.
1992-1993	Special Education Policy Implementation Team (SEPIT)	Following a consultation process this report made recommendations for the most effective ways to implement policy from Statement of Intent.
1993	Human Rights Act (amended 2001)	Protects New Zealanders from unlawful discrimination.
	Privacy Act	Guides how personal information can be collected, stored and used.
1995	Special Education Policy Guidelines	Principles underpinning special education guidelines published.

Appendix A

1996	Special Education 2000	Change in language from mainstreaming to inclusion. Changes to resourcing. Introduction of SEG grant, ORRS funding, RTLB. Introduction of transdisciplinary teams.
2001	New Zealand Disability Strategy: Making A World of Difference - Whakanui Oranga developed by Ministry of Health in collaboration with members from disability sectors.	Aim to remove the barriers faced by people with disabilities to create a society that is fully inclusive.
	Education Standards Act	Guides Board of Trustees' responsibilities in governance matters e.g. enrolment
	SES disestablished. Ministry of Education: Group Special Education (GSE) established.	Focus on a network of resource and support centres nationally
2005	Making a Bigger Difference for all Students: Schooling Strategy 2005 -2010	Strategy that sets direction for improving opportunities and outcomes for all students in New Zealand from 2005 -2010.
	Better Outcomes for Children - an action plan for GSE 2006-2011	Following meetings with parents, educators and others this plan describes a set of outcomes for students needing extra support. identifies key actions to strengthen GSE service.
2006	Draft Evidence-based Guideline for Autism Spectrum Disorder released for consultation. Ministries of Health and Education	Guidelines that aim to provide best practice to assist informed decision-making to improve outcomes for individuals with ASD.
1990 -2007	The National Education Guidelines including the National Education Goals, National Curriculum Statements, Te Anga Marautanga o Aotearoa:New Zealand Curriculum Framework, Te Whariki: He Whariki Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum and National Administration Guidelines direct schools in effective policy and practice.	

Appendix B
Information form for Principal / Board of Trustees

Information for Principal / Board of Trustees

Annie Guerin
xx xxxxx xxxx
xxxxxx
Phone xxxxxxx
E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxx

Dear

This year as part of my post graduate study at Christchurch College of Education I propose to undertake a research project investigating the use of a number of teaching strategies to help a student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder learn to understand the emotions and behaviours of others. Further to this, the study will investigate the issues that arise for participants when implementing such an intervention. It is envisaged that their reflections of the process may help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with ASD attempting to understand social situations. This study will be carried out as part of the Master of Teaching and Learning degree programme and my work will be supervised by Missy Morton and Susan Lovett who work at the Christchurch College of Education.

The Christchurch College of Education Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Participation in this project will provide participants with the opportunity to:

* Use new educational resources and strategies
* Teach and observe others teaching a new social skills programme
* Meet regularly with other team members to identify successes/ concerns and to solve problems within the teaching process
* Share their experiences as a team member working to address the learning needs of the student with ASD.
* Reflect on this process and make recommendations for future practice.

This intervention will take place over eleven school weeks and during that time participants will be required to:

* Be available for two interviews (approx. 45 mins each).
* Attend a workshop on using the educational resources (approx. 2 hours).
* Attend four x 1 hour meetings.
* Teach the student, observe the student being taught
* Use the data collection tools provided

During the project I would ask that participants keep a journal, which can

record any thoughts, ideas, examples of successes/failures and any other information participants think is relevant to the project. This journal can be kept on cassette tape, electronically or in a book.

I would like to interview participants before and after the intervention. Transcripts of the interviews and journal entries will be sent to participants and they will be asked to comment on them. The minutes of the meetings may highlight issues we need to discuss in the following meetings.

Participation in this project is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time.

All data gathered will be strictly confidential to myself, the supervisors and the person transcribing the interviews and journals. The names of the participants, school and any places mentioned in the research will be given pseudonyms. As this research is part of a thesis for the Master of Teaching and Learning programme a copy of the thesis will be disseminated and placed in the College library.

The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have a complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P.O. Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone 03 343 7780, ext 8390

If you have any questions regarding the study please contact one of my supervisors (ph 343 7780) or myself.

I trust this information is of help to you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Annie Guerin

Appendix C
Board of Trustees Consent Form

The Chairperson,
Board of Trustees,
_____ School,
_____

Board of Trustees Consent form

Project Title: MIndBlind: What does it mean to work in a team when teaching a student with ASD to understand the emotions and behaviours of others?

Researcher: Annie Guerin

Participants:
_____

_____

We give our consent to
_____

_____

participating in the above research project while employed as staff members at our school.

We understand that participation in this research project will be over eleven school weeks and that the research project will not identity the participants or our school.

We have read and understood the information sheet.

We understand that participation in this project is voluntary and that school staff member participants may withdraw at any stage of the project.

Signed:
Name:
Date:

Appendix D
Principal Consent Form

The Principal,

_____ School

_____

Principal Consent form

Project Title: MIndBlind: What does it mean to work in a team when teaching a student with ASD to understand the emotions and behaviours of others?

Researcher: Annie Guerin

Participant: _____

I give my consent to _____ participating in the above research project while employed as a staff member at my school.

I understand that participation in this research project will be over eleven school weeks and that the research project will not identity this participant or our school.

I have read and understood the information sheet.

I understand that any staff members' participation in this project is voluntary and that school staff participants may withdraw at any stage of the project.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

Appendix E
Information Sheet for Participants

Information for Participants

Annie Guerin
Xx xxxxx xx
xxxxxxxxx
Phone xxxxxxx
E-mail: xxxxxxxxxx

Dear

This year as part of my post graduate study at Christchurch College of Education I propose to undertake a research project investigating the use of a number of teaching strategies to help a student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder learn to understand the emotions and behaviours of others. Further to this, the study will investigate the issues that arise for you as a participant when implementing such an intervention. It is envisaged that your reflections of the process may help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with ASD attempting to understand social situations. This study will be carried out as part of the Master of Teaching and Learning degree programme and my work will be supervised by Missy Morton and Susan Lovett who work at the Christchurch College of Education.

The Christchurch College of Education Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Participation in this project will provide you with the opportunity to:

* Use new educational resources and strategies
* Teach, and observe others teaching a new social skills programme
* Meet regularly with other team members to identify successes/ concerns and to solve problems within the teaching process
* Share your experiences as a team member working to address the learning needs of the student with ASD.
* Reflect on this process and make recommendations for future practice.

This intervention will take place over eleven school weeks and during that time you will be required to:

* Be available for two interviews (approx. 45 mins each).
* Attend a workshop on using the educational resources (approx. 2 hours).
* Attend four x 1 hour meetings.

* Teach the student, observe the student being taught
* Use the data collection tools provided

During the project I would like to ask you to keep a journal which can record any thoughts, ideas, examples of successes/failures and any other information you think is relevant to the project. This journal can be kept on cassette tape, electronically or in a book.

I would like to interview you before and after the intervention. Transcripts of the interviews and journal entries will be sent to you and you will be asked to comment on them. The minutes of the meetings may highlight issues we need to discuss in the following meetings.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you may withdraw from it at any time.

All data gathered will be strictly confidential to myself, the supervisors and the person transcribing the interviews and journals. The names of the participants, school and any places mentioned in the research will be given pseudonyms. As this research is part of a thesis for the Master of Teaching and Learning programme a copy of the thesis will be disseminated and placed in the College library.

The College requires that you and the other participants be informed that if you have a complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to me (the researcher), or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P.O. Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone 03 343 7780, ext 8390

If you have any questions regarding the study please contact one of my supervisors (ph 343 7780) or myself.

I trust this information is of help to you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Annie Guerin

Appendix F
Participant Consent Form - Adult

Adult Participant Consent Form

MindBlind: What does it mean to work in a team when teaching a student with ASD to understand the emotions and behaviours of others?

I understand that by participating in the study I agree to:

Two interviews that will last approximately 45 minutes.

Undertaking training (a session of approximately 2 hours) to use the social skills resources and data collection tools.

Attend four meetings of approximately 1 hour duration.

Being observed whilst instructing and being able to observe others instructing the programme.

The opportunity to keep a journal to record any stories or issues between meetings
(This may be in a book, on tape or via e-mail).

The opportunity to read, comment on and return transcripts of interviews, journal and meeting minutes during and following the intervention.

I understand that by being involved as a participant in this study:

Participation is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any stage;

The data I give will be treated confidentially;

The data I give will be retained by the researcher for up to five years during which time it can be used by the researcher for any conference papers, journal articles or reports drawn from the data;

My identity will be protected. My name and the names of any others involved in the research will not be published or attributed to any quotes or comments used in publication. The name of the school and its locality will not be published.

All information will be stored securely, and available only to the researcher, the supervisors and the transcriber.

Name:_____ Phone:_____

Address:_____ E-mail:_____

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Please return to: Annie Guerin, xx xxxxx xxxx, xxxxxxxxxx

E-mail: xxxxxxxxxxx Phone: xxxxxxx

Appendix G:
Student Information Sheet

Student Information: Emotions and Social Skills

Annie Guerin
xx xxxxx xxxx
xxxxxxxxxx
Phone xx xxxxxxx
email xxxxxxxxxxxx

Dear

This is to tell you about some work your teachers and mum are doing to help you learn about emotions and to teach you some skills for playing and working with other children and adults.

Your mum and teachers are going to be talking to each other and to you about some skills games and activities to help you understand other students and adults. They will be working together to help you with both school work and homework. Annie will be asking you about what you think about your friends and about the work you do with the teachers and mum. The adults will be writing down information about what you do in the school lessons and the work you do at home with Mum. This will help them to understand how you are learning.

You can ask Annie to stop if you do not want to answer the questions when she is listening to you.

When you are working at school on the skills games and activities you will be able to use Take a Break cards and the Take 5 card if you need to be on your own.

We think your clever ideas are important.

Your mum will sign a form to say that you can talk with Annie and this is okay with you. If you do not want to do this, you need to tell her.

You can change your mind later if you do not want to talk to Annie about your friends and learning. You can tell Mum or your teachers or teacher aide.

If you are worried or would like to ask a question you can talk to Mum, your teachers or teacher aide. They will keep this private if you ask them to.

When we talk to other people about your school work and thoughts we will not use your name or your mum's or teachers' names.
If you want to know more about this you can talk to your mum, teachers or teacher aide at school.

Annie is working as a student at the Christchurch College of Education. This project is part of her work. The College has a special committee to look at Annie's work. The Christchurch College of Education Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

The College requires that you and the other participants be told that if you have a complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to me (the researcher), or, if an independent person is preferred, to:
The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P.O. Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone 03 343 7780, ext 8390

Thank you for reading this letter

Annie Guerin

Appendix H
Information Form for Parent

Information for Parent

Annie Guerin
xx xxxxx xxxx
xxxxxxxxxx
Ph xxxxxxxxx
email: xxxxxxxxxxxxx

Dear

This year as part of my post graduate study at Christchurch College of Education I propose to undertake a research project investigating the use of a number of teaching strategies to help a student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder learn to understand the emotions and behaviours of others. Further to this, the study will investigate the issues that arise for participants when implementing such an intervention. It is envisaged that their reflections of the process may help to identify barriers to learning and/or successful strategies that promote learning for students with ASD attempting to understand social situations. This study will be carried out as part of the Master of Teaching and Learning degree programme and my work will be supervised by Missy Morton and Susan Lovett who work at the Christchurch College of Education.

The Christchurch College of Education Human Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

The intervention will take place over eleven school weeks and during that time the student will be receiving individualised lessons using Theory of Mind practices, social skills instruction and small group learning activities to practise social skills on a daily basis. The student will be supported with a lunchtime schedule and some follow up social skills activities will be set as homework.
The project will be utilising a team consisting of the parent of the student, the student's classroom teacher, teacher aide and myself as a teacher/ researcher to meet and work together to address any issues in the implementation of such a programme. Team members will have the opportunity to observe each other working with the student and to practise new skills and strategies within the intervention. Data will be collected daily and the parent of the student is welcome to view this at any time during and after the intervention.

A separate information sheet outlines participant responsibilities for this project.

The student will be given the opportunity to participate in two interviews (one pre intervention, one post intervention). Participation in these interviews is voluntary and the student may withdraw at any time.

All data gathered will be strictly confidential to myself, the supervisors and the person transcribing the interviews and journals. The names of the participants, school and any places mentioned in the research will be given pseudonyms. As this research is part of a thesis for the Master of Teaching and Learning programme a copy of the thesis will be disseminated and placed in the College library.

The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have a complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P.O. Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone 03 343 7780, ext 8390

If you have any questions regarding the study please contact one of my supervisors (ph 343 7780) or myself.

I trust this information is of help to you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Annie Guerin

Appendix I
Student Consent Form
Mother of Student -Consent Form

Student Consent Form

I have read the information sheet about the social skills project and I understand it.

I know that.....

I don't have to talk with Annie about my friends unless I want to.

I can ask Annie to stop the interview at any time.

I can use the Take a Break cards or the Take 5 card when I am in my lessons and I need a break or I am becoming angry.

If something is written about me it will not have my name on it, and no-one will know it is about me.

If I ever have questions I can ask Annie about them or get Mum to ask her.

No bad things will happen to me if I change my mind about the interview.

I would like to be interviewed.

_____ My signature

_____ The date

I don't want to be interviewed.

_____My signature

_____The date

I have read the information for the thesis project **MindBlind: What does it mean to work in a team when teaching a student with ASD to**

understand the emotions and behaviours of others? and I am happy for my child _____
_____ to participate in this study. I am also satisfied that my child understands what will be required of him in this project.

Signature of Parent:

Name of Parent:

Date:

Appendix J
Research Timetable

SEPT 12	SEP 19	OCT 10	OCT 17	OCT 24	OCT 31	NOV 7	NOV 14	NOV 21	NOV 28	DECEMBER 5 - DECEMBER 15
Data Collection: School Reports IEP Home-School Book Time Out Records Health Reports SLT report Funding report Baseline Assessment: Emotions Belief Observation of Play (Howlin et al) POSD Play Profiles Interviews: Student Parent Aide Teacher Staff Meeting, First participant meeting	**Daily Lessons (2x 25 minute sessions):** (a) **Mind Reading Programme (Howlin, Baron-Cohen and Hadwin, 2000)** (b) **Exploring Feelings - Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to Manage Anger (Baron-Cohen,Hill,Golan & Wheelwright, 2002)** **(Attwood, 2004)** **3 x weekly (45 minutes):** **(c) Integrated Play Group (Wolfberg, 2003)** **Daily:** **(d) Super Skills Social Skills Programme (Whole Class) (Coucouvanis, 2005)** **Supplemented by trialling of:** **(a) Practical exercises for homework** **(b) Activity Schedule for the playground**									Data Collection: End of Unit teaching assessment: Emotions Belief Video of Play (Howlin et al) Play profiles POSD Interviews: Student Parent Aide Teacher Observations: Playground Classroom Time Out Records Diaries
Ongoing Data Collection	Daily lesson workbook to be completed by instructor, Journals kept by parent, aide, teacher and student Week 2: Modelling by researcher Lessons Mon, Tues, Fri, Researcher observing Wed and Thurs Weeks 3-10 Lessons 1,2,4 taken by TA/Teacher. Lessons 3, 5 instructor and researcher teach/ observe.									
Meetings between Parent, TA, Teacher and Researcher *			*			*			*	

Appendix K
Classroom Timetable

Appendix K
Classroom timetable

Timetable Term 3/4 Tane T = teaching , O = observing

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
9:00 - 9: 15	Read - Spelling test Daily Schedule	Read - Spelling test Daily Schedule	Read - Spelling test Daily Schedule	Read - Spelling test Daily Schedule	Read - Spelling test Daily Schedule
9:15 - 9:35	Computer - Mind Reading Annie T / Sam O	Computer - Mind Reading Lisa T / Annie O	Computer - Mind Reading Sam T/ Lisa O	Computer - Mind Reading Annie T	Computer - Mind Reading Sam teaching
9:40 - 10:00	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Junior Assembly
10:00 -10:30	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
10:30 -10:50	PLAYTIME	PLAYTIME	PLAYTIME	PLAYTIME	PLAYTIME
10:50 -11.15	All about Me Lisa O / Sam T	All about Me Lisa T/ Sam O	All about Me Sam T/ Annie O	All about Me Annie T	Kapa Haka
11:15 -12:00	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths	Maths
12:00 -12:30	Handwriting	Handwriting	Handwriting	Handwriting	Handwriting
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch & Play	Lunch & Play	Lunch & Play	Lunch & Play	Lunch & Play
1:30 - 1.55	Super Skills Annie T/ Sam O	Library	Super Skills Sam T/ Annie O	Silent book / share	Super Skills Sam T/ Lisa O x 3
1:55 -2:45	Sensory Work	Sensory Work	Sensory Work	Sensory Work	Sensory Work
2:45 - 3:00	Tidy up	Tidy up	Tidy up	Tidy up	Tidy up
3:00	Home	Home	Home	Home	Home

Appendix L

Duncan's Programme Resources

Mind Reading

The Mind Reading: Interactive Guide to emotions programme was presented on a CD rom set and contained a wide range of activities designed to develop understanding of emotions and recognition of the expression of emotions in the faces and voices of others. It also provided a range of activity sheets that could be printed from or used with the computer.

The Cambridge University team led by Baron-Cohen has developed a taxonomy of emotions providing twenty-four groups of emotions encompassing 412 discrete emotional concepts. The programme provided six different levels for students to learn, from the most simple to the most sophisticated. It presented an encyclopedia of emotions, a learning centre where you could develop your understanding of emotion groups by participating in lessons, and quizzes and a games zone where you could play games, which reinforced lessons taught. Learning was supported by a rewards library, which suited a wide range of tastes. As Duncan both struggled with understanding emotions and excelled in computer skills Sam felt this would be a valuable resource for us to use.

Exploring Feelings: Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to manage Anger

Attwood (2004) suggests that Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is a powerful tool in "changing the way a person thinks about, and responds to, feelings such as anxiety, sadness etc." (p. 3). This programme provided students with opportunities to learn about emotions and activities to highlight the connection between thoughts, feelings, behaviour and the way we perceive situations. Practice was provided for new cognitive skills and cognitive restructuring rectified "distorted conceptualizations and dysfunctional beliefs" (p.4). Students were encouraged to identify tools which could help them as they practiced new skills. It was a one to one programme that used practical activities to assist the student in small step learning.

The effectiveness of the Exploring Feelings programme in reducing reported levels of anxiety or anger in students with ASD has been investigated (Attwood and Sofronoff,

in press) with significant decreases in inappropriate behaviour being observed. Further to this parents perceived an increase in both their own confidence in managing their child's anger and in their child's ability to manage their anger. Polly was very interested in this resource, and felt it was essential in any programme for Duncan. She was particularly interested in its impact on Duncan's social interactions within his community.

Integrated Play Group

The Integrated Play Group model was developed from Wolfberg's 1987 thesis project, which focussed on the social interaction gains and play of students with ASD. The success of this project has lead to a number of studies (Wolfberg, 1999; Wolfberg & Schuler, 1992; Zercher et al., 2001) that have realized gains in social interaction and the generalisation of new social and play skills across settings.

Students with ASD are supported in play groups with same age peers or siblings in mutually enjoyed play experiences. For the purpose of this intervention the group was limited to five students. One student was Duncan, one student was identified as a concern by Lisa, and three students were described by Sam as *"average peers who have a number of social skills they can use in play and conflict situations."* These three participants would be changed during the term so that the group participants experienced a range of play/interaction situations and partners.

The children's socialization and play was guided through a clearly defined system that identified members' specific needs. Ongoing assessments determined the focus and length of support offered to group members. Visual resources were printed to guide the students through a session format and also to identify specific resources and play areas. Students participated in the integrated play group for three 25-minute sessions per week. I chose this resource, as I was particularly interested in the way that adults could support the development of play in students with disabilities within a regular school setting. I was also interested in observing the students' ability to generalize such learning.

Super Skills

Coucouvanis (2005) developed a social skills programme for students with ASD, drawing on the work of researchers and her observations when teaching and working with students with ASD. Although the programme was designed for children with ASD to work alongside each other, this is not always practical in small rural schools, where there may only be one student with ASD. The programme provided a highly structured set of social skills lessons with small step learning. Skills prompt sheets gave simple steps to remember what to do in a social situation e.g. how to enter a game.

Coucouvanis argues that traditional social skills programmes are too sophisticated for students with ASD, thus she focusses on teaching the simplest social skills. Pre and post intervention checklists provided evidence of specific skill knowledge from the student's, parent's and school staff's perspectives and observations. Assessment was completed across all team members who worked with the student. Duncan also completed an evaluation of his own skills. Lisa was interested in this resource, not only for Duncan, but also for her class. She had identified a number of students with poor social skills within her class and wished to trial an adapted version with all the children. We agreed to trial this resource, teaching those social skills that we identified as gaps in Duncan's repertoire, to the whole class.

Each week, during a 20-minute session, I introduced a social skill to the class and a visual prompt sheet was left on the wall for students to refer to. They were also given a copy of the prompt sheet for their Topic book. Students participated in discussion and modelling, but were not required to complete any writing. This style of teaching suited a number of students who had poor literacy skills. Lisa would use a follow up 20-minute session later in the week to allow children to discuss their use of the new social skill and to reiterate steps in accomplishing the new skill. Duncan was given four ten minute periods during the week where the new social skill could be discussed and modelled if necessary. Challenges in using the skill could be identified and reflection of success was provided by Lisa, Sam or me.

Appendix M

Participants' perceptions of the partnership process

Participants' perceptions of how the QLC partnership might work

At the beginning of the study participants expressed their views about how they thought the QLC partnership could work. Sam, the paraprofessional, expected that, *" We'll all have the same skills, or all discuss and share the same skills, we'll all know what to expect of each other…I think it will be a benefit (working in a partnership) because we'll feel supported…there'll be more support for each other*."

Lisa, the teacher, was positive about her expectations of the QLC partnership stating, *" I don't see any issues with it, with communicating (between partners) …It could be quite hard if the parent wasn't approachable, but she is. Polly is very approachable.*" She did not see the partners as equally knowledgeable at this time, *" I'm willing, I'm enthusiastic, I'll do whatever you want me to*."

Polly, the parent, saw the participants as an already effective team and wished to continue working in a similar fashion, "*Everyone has worked so well. It's been great for Duncan and me. We have felt supported in this school."*

I was keen to start the study and had high expectations of the partnership process. I wrote in my journal, "*Am really interested to see how we can manage a team without a leader. Am looking for another way to work together. Think we can all participate equally, but not sure quite how we're going to get there*."

Participants experiences of the process of the QLC partnership

At the end of the study participants were asked to reflect on the process of the QLC partnership. Lisa thought it was successful because, "*I was able to see a whole picture. You know that's the reality of being a classroom teacher and not seeing what else is going on*." She was able to identify a stronger relationship with Polly due to the experience of being in the QLC, *" I've been involved in it (decision making) the whole way. Polly's been involved the whole way. I've got a relationship with Polly now. I've got a relationship with Duncan now and it's because we have all been on the same page the whole time*."

Sam was positive about the process she experienced, "*I feel we worked really well as a team…we've got equal parts and we share the roles…I found it to be very supportive. I've liked being able to run my ideas across the others and the feedback you've all given me has made me more productive within my role…It's far more a shared process and I found that more enjoyable*."

Polly saw the process as a continuation of working within a positive team, " *It's been great for Duncan, for all of us. The communication's just great. It's been amazing. I've felt like I'm a part of it, because I've been included in everything that's gone on*."

Like Polly, Sam and Lisa, I reflected on a positive experience, *" I believe we have made a difference – for Duncan and ourselves. Developing better listening skills and being able to share responsibility have had the biggest impact on my work*."